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August 21, 1895.

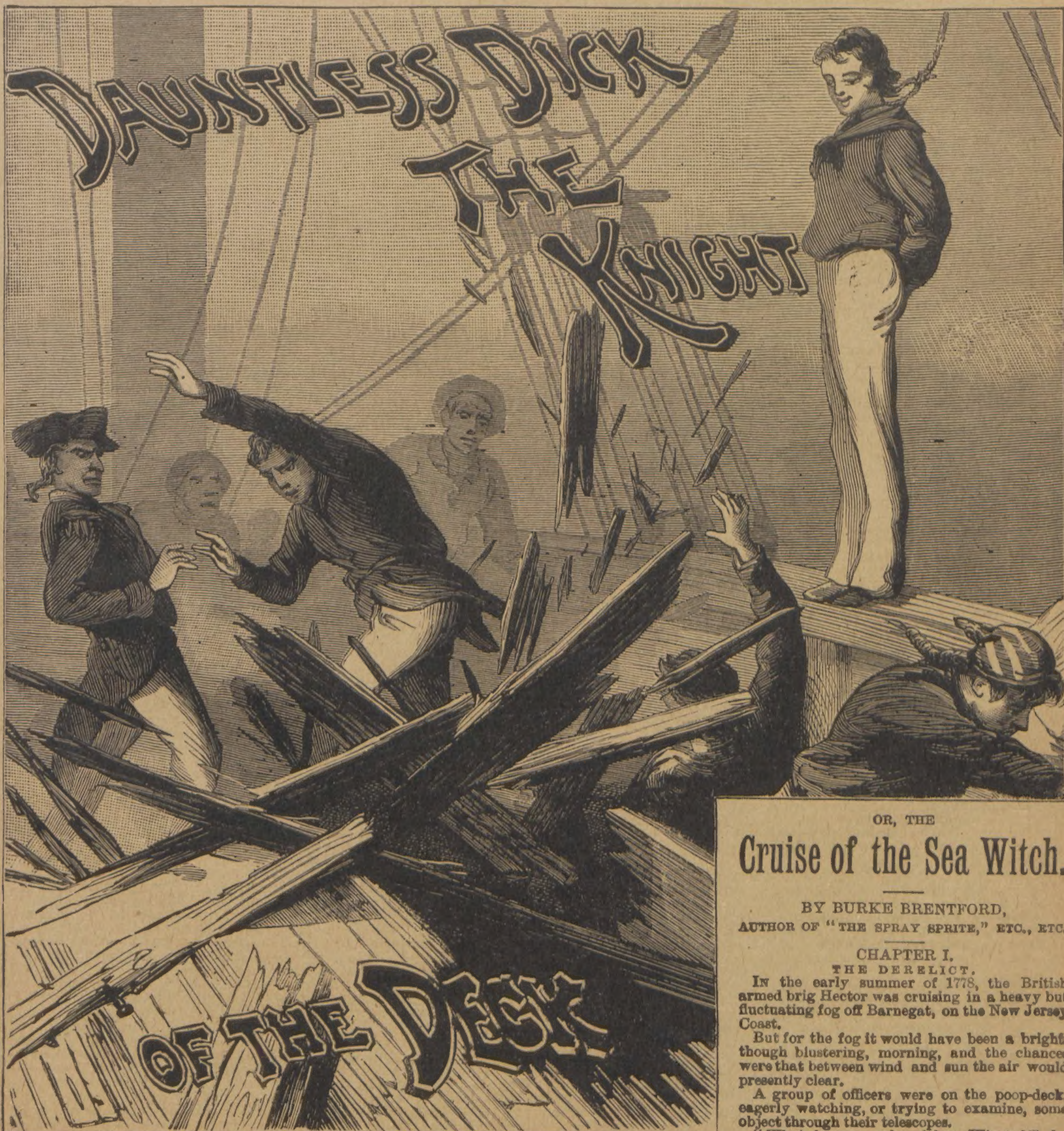
No. 878.

Published Every
Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
93 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

Vol. LXVIII.



OR, THE Cruise of the Sea Witch.

BY BURKE BRENTFORD,
AUTHOR OF "THE SPRAY SPRITE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. THE DERELICT.

IN the early summer of 1778, the British armed brig Hector was cruising in a heavy but fluctuating fog off Barnegat, on the New Jersey Coast.

But for the fog it would have been a bright, though blustering, morning, and the chances were that between wind and sun the air would presently clear.

A group of officers were on the poop-deck, eagerly watching, or trying to examine, some object through their telescopes.

"What do you make of her, Winsted?" demanded Lieutenant Romney, the officer in command, of a more elderly officer at his side, who

"THE MIST WITCH! AND SHE'S ALMOST ABOARD US!" YELLED ROMNEY, SPRINGING TOWARD HIS QUARTER-DECK, MUCH TO THE PRISONER'S AMUSEMENT.

was leveling his glass for perhaps the twentieth time with a puzzled air. "There! now she partly looms out again."

And he quickly brought his own glass to bear.

"A derelict, I think, sir," was the reply. "At all events, it's a wreck of some sort, and—Ha! A derelict, indeed, by St. George! ready to go to pieces at any minute, and with a live man lashed to the stump of her foremast."

"What! are you sure?"

Past Midshipman Winsted was known to have the sharpest eyes aboard the brig, but this announcement seemed hardly credible.

"Perfectly sure, captain," was the quiet reply. "Wait, There!"

Then the fog momentarily lifted in the quarter at which they were gazing, and his announcement was verified.

A battered and dismantled schooner, her decks awash, and seemingly about to disappear at every plunge she made into the troughs of the angry sea. Yes, and there, at the stump of the foremast, a man was lashed. He could be distinctly seen, and it was also apparent that he was alive and endeavoring to make a signal of distress as well as his lashings would permit.

All this in a momentary glimpse, and then the fog settled down once more, shutting out the tragic spectacle.

"Lower away!" ordered the commander. "The poor devil must be rescued if a boat can reach him in time."

A boat was at once sent off in the direction of the fog-shrouded wreck.

While it was putting off, the cabin steward brought up word that breakfast was served.

"Keep a good lookout, Winsted," enjoined Romney to his second in command, before stepping down the companionway. "There is no telling when that sea-devil, Dick Dareall, might slip out upon us in this accursed fog." He looked about him somewhat anxiously. "The Barnegat reaches, hereabouts, are his chief haunt, and I don't want a gun from his Mist Witch to shiver our timbers, with perchance not a glimpse of the infernal schooner herself."

"Yes, captain, the best lookout I can. But I hardly fancy that even the Rebel schooner, witch as she may be, could do much cruising in this weather."

Romney, with the rest of his subordinate officers, then went down to breakfast.

He was a powerfully-built, fair-faced, handsome man of thirty or thereabouts, whose high position as lieutenant-commander in the British Navy was chiefly owing to his aristocratic connections.

The Hector was a small brig carrying two guns, and was patrolling the coast from New York Bay southward on the lookout for just such coastwise enemies of the crown, half-freebooters, half-privateersmen, as the individual mentioned.

As for Dareall, he had already made himself notorious, if not respected, by the boldness and success of his attacks. Various known as "Dauntless Dick," "the Coast Scourge," "the Reef King," and "Daring Dick," he would issue out of the intricate inlets of Barnegat, strike his blow, and be gone so swiftly and mysteriously in his fleet schooner that there was not a little superstition associated with his success. He was as much a thorn in the side of the British marine as he was a glory to the Americans; and General Washington had more than once made mention of his prowess with undisguised satisfaction in his dispatches to the Congress from New Jersey, which was at this juncture the field of his campaign.

In the mean time, the brig's boat, under the command of a jolly young midshipman named Harker, succeeded in reaching the wreck, and taking off the man, just before the battered hulk went out of sight beneath the waves.

"I say, young chap," said the midshipman, cheerily, "we were just in the nick of time, weren't we?"

"Yes, thank you," was the composed reply. "But then, I've had many a closer shave than even that between me and Davy Jones's locker."

Harker, who sat with the rescued man in the stern-sheets while the boat was groping its way back to the brig—a tedious and uncertain business—eyed his companion curiously.

He was a young fellow of superb physique, and apparently every inch a sailor, with a suggestion of power and resolution in face and glance.

On being told the name and character of the vessel to which the boat belonged, he seemed to manifest a certain uneasiness, which, however, speedily disappeared, leaving him wary and calm.

"I'm mighty glad we've saved you, old fellow!" cried the middy, slapping him jovially on the knee.

"So am I," was the laconic reply.

"You couldn't have been long lashed to that old hulk, eh?"

"Not more than six hours."

"Who placed you in such a pickle?"

"My enemy."

"I should think so. But who might he be?"

"George Collingford, by name."

"What! the rich Tory—or I should say Loyalist—back of Barnegat?"

"The same."

"By the way, my friend, are you a king's man or a blasted Rebel?"

"I am an American patriot."

Harker gave a low whistle.

"It may go hard with you on the brig, friend," he observed, not unkindly. "Our commander hates your sort as the devil hates holy water."

"Who commands the Hector?"

"Lieutenant Romney."

The other gave a start.

"Lieutenant George Romney—the friend and distant relative of Tory Collingford?" he exclaimed.

"That's our captain."

"Humph!"

And the stranger relapsed into his indifference.

"I say, friend," Harker continued, in his hearty way, "I haven't asked you your own name yet."

"Don't, then, for—much as I am beholden to you—I shan't tell it."

"Well, you needn't be in such a blasted mysterious mood, anyway!" cried the midshipman, in something of a huff. "I don't take you for one of the royal family, at all events."

"Rather glad of that," composedly. "I don't admire royal families."

The stranger, however, vouchsafed to give some details of the situation in which he had been found. When separated from his ship in a small boat on the preceding night, he had been picked up by Mr. Collingford's yacht. Collingford was his hated foe, and, the crazy derelict chancing along at about the same time, the stranger had forthwith been lashed upon it, at his enemy's orders, and then abandoned to his fate, it being evident that the wreck could keep afloat but a few hours longer. That was all he would say.

"Well, let me tell you this, friend," said the midshipman, good-naturedly. "It will be a blessed good thing for you if you don't turn out to belong to any of these blasted freebooting smacks along the coast here, and, worst of all, to that devil's craft, the Mist Witch, with which Master Dareall has been harassing our store-ships and transports ever since the beginning of the war. It will be short shrift and a yard-arm dance with you in that case."

"Thank you, Mr. Midshipman," was the reply. "I will take my chances as to that."

And he did so—to his cost!

For, scarcely was he on the Hector's deck, and in Commander Romney's presence, before the latter exclaimed, exultantly:

"Good Lord! is this our castaway of the derelict? Why, it is Dick Dareall himself!"

There was an instant sensation.

"It is true," replied the young man, quietly.

"To the yard-arm with him!" roared the Britisher. "Not ten minutes' grace for the murdering Rebel freebooter!"

Harker ventured to interpose with the young man's story of his having been lashed to the wreck, but the commander would scarcely listen.

"Served him right!" cried the latter. "Mr. Collingford is a gentleman and a Loyalist, who doubtless had as good reasons for wishing this coast pirate at the bottom of the sea as I have for launching him into the air, with a rope's-end for a necktie. Mr. Winsted," turning to the officer of the deck, "make ready for the execution on the spot."

"Yes, sir," eagerly. "Five minutes are time enough."

And the preparations were forthwith expedited.

In a few minutes Dick Dareall stood on the starboard rail amidships, his arms pinioned behind him, a noose about his neck, and in readiness to be swung off from the yard-arm.

CHAPTER II.

THE MIST WITCH.

THE prospective victim of this brutal piece of business had borne himself with an indifference that could but challenge the admiration of the brig's crew, who were gathered around in a solid mass to witness his death.

Once his clear eyes kindled as he exchanged a glance with one man among them whom he recognized as a fellow-townsmen, doubtless a pressed man; but that was all, and even now he did not betray fear by so much as a change of color in his bronzed cheek or by the flutter of an eyelid.

"You can have your say before you are swung off, Dareall," called out Romney, with mock courtesy. "His Majesty's officers are indulgent, even when dealing with pirates and rebels. And, since your Mist Witch is about to lose her rudder and compass in losing you, there is no objection to your saying a few parting words, if you wish to."

"Thank you, Lieutenant Romney," replied

the condemned man, fixing his undaunted gaze contemptuously on his insulter. "I have merely this to say, then, for the enlightenment of your officers and crew: It is for being neither a pirate nor a rebel that you are about to hang me."

"Oho! And for what then, pray?"

Before answering Dareall looked about him and snuffed the fog-laden air with a peculiar smile, almost as if he might be scenting a chance for life from somewhere in the milky obscurity.

"You are about to hang me for just this, Lieutenant Romney: To assist your relative, Tory Collingford, in his cowardly wooing of my sweetheart, Jessie Dearborn, by putting me out of the way. Yes," with increased contemptuousness as he marked the commander's face first pale and then blacken, as it were, "and you doubtless think it may better your own chances with her fair cousin, Mistress Naomi Goldheart, who at present scorns and despises you as you deserve."

"It is false!" shouted Romney, hoarse with rage; "false as hell! Swing him off, there! Not another word from his lying lips!"

Before the order could be obeyed, however—and, to the honor of a majority of the brig's officers and crew, they were but reluctant participants in the prospective tragedy—Dareall suddenly straightened himself under the rope, and, gazing eagerly to larboard, called out in a ringing voice:

"Sail ho!"

As all heads were instinctively turned in the same direction, there was a flash in the fog, a muffled boom from close at hand, and a twenty-four-pound round-shot tore along the brig's decks, killing or wounding half a dozen men, and knocking the hood of the companionway into splinters.

"The Mist Witch! and she's almost aboard us!" yelled Romney, springing toward his quarter-deck, much to the prisoner's amusement. Everything else was forgotten in the excitement of the moment. "Beat to quarters, and clear the decks for action!"

And a dozen similar orders, hurriedly obeyed, poured from his lips in rapid succession.

In the general confusion, Dareall jumped down from the bulwark unheeded, and was instantly joined by the pressed man with whom he had exchanged glances.

A swift stroke of the latter's jack-knife severed both halter and pinioning cords, and then the man stood irresolute.

"Jack Simmons," said Dareall, in a low voice, but one that had the instinctive ring of the born commander, "you are here on this king's ship against your will, I take it?"

"Of course. The press-gang snatched me up."

"Then give me your tarpaulin, and lead the way down into the fore-castle hold."

Dareall snatched the man's hat and clapped it on his own head as he spoke, and the other forthwith led the way down the fore-hatch just as a second ball from the fog-shrouded enemy swept the deck, doing greater execution than before, and thus increasing the panic and confusion to the two men's advantage.

Once safely under hatches, with no sign of their maneuver having been observed, Dareall said:

"You know the way to the forward magazine?"

"Of course I do."

"And the locker where the slow-match fuses are kept?"

"Certainly."

"Lead on, then."

"Good Lord, Dick!" exclaimed Simmons, hesitating, for he was of less desperate stuff than his companion; "what would you do?"

"Add a British armed brig to the list of the Mist Witch's prizes, which have thus far been the smallest sort of fry. Lead on, I tell you!"

Simmons obeyed.

In the mean time the confusion on deck continued.

The brig, a good sailer, was cleverly enough handled, but could do little or nothing toward returning the fire of her for the most part invisible foe.

Every succeeding flash in the mist, which meant another cannon-ball into the brig's hull or along her crowded deck, came from a widely-different quarter, indicating that the witch-like schooner was sailing around her enemy in a circle; and therefore every shot from the brig's guns, guided as it necessarily was simply by the last hostile flash, was wasted in the milky obscurity.

Romney stamped on the deck in impotent rage as a shot at last carried away his vessel's bowsprit, to the serious detriment of her sailing powers.

"Good God!" he exclaimed; "this is the devil's magic of sea-fighting with a vengeance! Must we be knocked to pieces by an antagonist that we can never see? And if she can see us, why can't we see her?"

"They must have some extra-sort of fog-piercing telescopes, sir," suggested Harker.

"Bear away there!" shouted Winsted; "there she is at last!"

Yes; there, not ten cable-lengths astern, as the wind and sun together momentarily parted the heavy mists, suddenly loomed out the little schooner, looking like a veritable phantom of the sea, and with her trim deck black with men.

"Quick!" gasped Romney; "quick, Winsted! You are the best sighter we have. Now let her have it from our stern-chaser!"

But, Winsted had already sprung to the gun, and the gunner was beside him, lighted fuse in hand.

Yet, even in that brief space the little schooner had rounded out in perfect silence, as if she was a caressed creature of the fickle fogs and winds themselves.

"Quick, Winsted, or you are too late!" cried Romney again, in an agony of excitement. "The fog is shutting her out again."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

Having leveled the piece to his satisfaction, Winsted rose, and signed for the match.

It was in his hand; another instant would send the bolt upon its way, when flash! from the now shadowy schooner's stern, and the gun was dismounted by the shot that followed, while the gunner who had passed the match was instantly killed by the upset, Winsted himself narrowly escaping with his life.

Then, a faint, ghostly sort of cheer from out the fog, and the schooner was once more invisible, and ready for the resumption of her deadly tactics.

"The gun is perfectly useless, sir," said Winsted, desperately, as he returned to the commander's side—"knocked into smithereens!"

This left the brig with but one gun, the one at the bow, though, for that matter, she might as well have been with none at all in the extraordinary plight in which she found herself.

Commander Romney was very pale.

"We must stand it the best we can," he replied, hoarsely, "and pray for the fog to lift before we are knocked to pieces. There is no other course. By the way, what is become of that rascal we were about to hang?"

"He vanished in the first confusion," Midshipman Harker took it upon himself to answer. "I fancy some one must have cut him loose, and he may have gone overboard, or skulked below."

"Who could have cut him loose?" roared Romney, lashing himself into a fury again.

"Tush, tush, sir!" interposed his second in command. "You must know that we've more than one pressed man on board."

"True, true!" controlling himself again. "Well, gentlemen," addressing his subordinate officers collectively—there were seven or eight in all, mostly midshipmen, "to your posts, and let us hope for the best. And, Mr. Harker, pray see the surgeon in the cockpit, and report our casualties to me thus far."

"Yes, sir."

Then there was another shot from seaward, which carried away the foretopmast, and the fog shut down on the doomed brig in a thick, blinding mass.

CHAPTER III.

"IT'S MY TURN NOW!"

THE brig had by this time reefed in and come to a standstill, so far as making any progress through the water was concerned, as being about the only thing she could do until the fog should lift.

She simply rose and fell on the swells, awaiting the seemingly magic shots from out the bosom of the mist, few of which missed their mark, and not knowing what one might send her to the bottom.

And now at this juncture, when the fog shut down upon her so thickly that the men could hardly distinguish each other an arm's length apart, Lieutenant Romney found himself momentarily left alone on his quarter-deck.

What could it mean? Never in his naval experience had he seen or heard of anything like the predicament in which the little brig was placed.

How could she thus be made the visible target of an enemy invisible itself? His superstitions began to be excited, yet never for an instant did he think of surrendering as a way out of the apparently insurmountable dilemma. True, the brig was nothing more than a merchantman turned into a gunboat for coastwise exigencies; still, she was commissioned in the king's service. And one of his Majesty's cruisers, however insignificant, to surrender to a rascally little coast wasp like this Mist Witch!

And yet—what was to be done? Even as he reflected there came another shot, followed by the crash of something else giving way aloft there in the cloudy obscurity. He could hear the voices of his officers hoarsely calling to the men to stand to their posts and trust in God. Could there be more absolute or tragic helplessness than this?

Midshipman Harker came back from the cockpit with the report that seven of the ship's company were dead and thirteen badly wounded on the surgeon's hands.

The brig's entire crew consisted of but seventy men.

Romney made no comment on the report, but

ordered the midshipman on a tour of investigation forward.

The young man made a shadowy salute, faded off forward in the mists, and Romney was once more left to the solitude of his bitter and harassing reflections.

Suddenly he became aware of two figures approaching him from the port side of the poop.

One of them paused, the other and taller advanced until his features could be dimly discerned through the thick mist.

The British commander drew himself up to his full height, and was about to demand the meaning of this intrusion upon his official privacy—deeming the man one of his own jack-tars—when the latter spoke.

"Look to your forecastle magazine," he said. "In two minutes it will blow up."

Romney reeled back, at once recognizing the voice and face.

And yet he demanded, in a sort of hoarse gasp:

"Who are you?"

"The man you would have so cowardly hanged," was the response. "It's my turn now!"

Then, with a single crashing blow of the fist, Dauntless Dick dashed the British commander to the deck.

Then there was a flitting of the two figures toward the starboard rail, a double splash, and both men had leaped into the sea!

Romney had given a yell upon going down, which at once brought several of his officers to his aid.

"Treason! villainy!" he cried, while being assisted to his feet. "The forecastle magazine—look to it!"

But the two minutes had elapsed! There was a roar forward, the brig trembled; then followed a tremendous flash, illuminating the white mist, and half the deck between foremast and fore-chains was seen to be torn to atoms.

This was accompanied by the yells of mangled or frightened men, while almost instantly great tongues of flame shot up from below and began to wreath the foremast like ruddy snakes.

Dauntless Dick had done his work well!

"All hands forward to extinguish flames!" yelled Winsted, seeing that his commander was still too dazed to grasp the situation. "Steady, there!"

And, followed by his fellow-officers, he rushed forward to set the paralyzed crew a brave example, just as a shot from the mist-curtained enemy ripped the combings off the main-hatch and sent a good six feet of the midships port bulwerk into kindling-wood.

Fortunately, at this juncture, the fog began to lift and drift off with amazing rapidity, so that the work of extinguishing the flames was greatly facilitated.

But the explosion had tumbled the brig's bow-gun backward into the gaping cavity it had caused, so that she was now practically powerless.

In the mean time, Dareall and Simmons had climbed into the brig's yawl towing at her stern, and, cutting the painter, the latter at once made good use of the pair of oars stowed along the thwarts.

Luck favored them at first, the clearing mist afterward, and, ten minutes later, they were picked up by the Mist Witch!

"What, Captain Dick!" cried a rough, but honest-looking old sailor, who was in command, as he sprung forward to grasp Dareall's hand; "it is really you! We had given you up for lost ever since you drifted off in the small boat last night. Where are you from?"

"From aboard the brig," was the reply. "But, no more questions at present, Junk. And never mind the fog lifting. The brig is defenseless. Where is Fog-eye Flinders, the gunner?"

The crew, about thirty in number, had gathered around their young skipper, thus providentially restored to them, as it were, and were cheering vociferously.

But a silence fell as the young captain held up his hand, and there stepped forth from among them the man he had asked for.

This was a tall, lean, lanky, but very muscular, Jersey fisherman, upon whom the phenomenal success of the Mist Witch in many a blinding coast fog had mostly depended.

Under Sam Junk, Dareall's second in command, he was both sailing-master and gunner on board the little schooner, with its one rusty twenty-four-pounder rigged at the stern. His eyes could hardly be seen, they were so small, gray and bead-like, and set so far back into his head.

But, impenetrable, indeed, must have been the mist that they could not pierce to a vast distance; and it was to this exceptional quality that he owed his sobriquet of Fog-eye, his real Christian name being Hezekiah.

"Fog-eye, you've done magnificently," exclaimed Dareall, grasping the man's hand. "We've yonder British armed brig as good as whipped into our hands, and it has been chiefly owing to you."

"Yes," assented old Sam Junk, gruffly—he was often called 'Salt' Junk for a change—"Hez Flinders never did better than to-day, Cap. He just centered the brig for me, so that I could sail around her, like a cooper around a barrel, while he let fly with old Tom Barker yonder."

"Wal, Cap'n Dick," replied the lanky owner of the exceptional optics, scratching his head and rolling the enormous quid in his cheek, "ye see, I jest peeked an' peeked, an' then let Barker go at 'em. But ef I'd knowed you was aboard the Redcoat I mought hev did still better."

"That would have been hardly possible," observed Dareall, with a laugh.

He then formally introduced Jack Simmons to his ship's company, and briefly reported his own extraordinary adventures since drifting away from the schooner the previous night.

The crew of the Mist Witch were furiously indignant.

"They would have hanged our captain!" roared a dozen voices. "We'll yard-arm every Britisher aboard the brig."

"No, you won't!" cried Dick, commandingly. "We are not in that cowardly business, if the Britishers are. Besides, Romney would have hanged me for personal reasons, more than for mere fighting in the patriot cause. As for Tory Collingford—well, I may have something different to say regarding him, should he fall into our hands. But, yonder's the brig. We'll wear in on her, and make an ending of this business at once."

Indeed, the fog had by this time almost wholly disappeared, and the Hector was broadly visible about a mile away, cracking on what sail she could in her disabled condition, and with an appearance of having got the fire in her forecastle under control.

But the Mist Witch—once the pride of the coast fishing fleet—was a skimmer of the seas no less in clear weather than in thick.

Dancing lightly over the leaping crests before the freshening north wind, she soon had the brig overhauled, and, with the patriot flag streaming from her gaff, ran close in under her lee.

CHAPTER IV.

"NO MORE SMALL FRY!"

"Do you surrender?" bawled Dauntless Dick, from his little quarter-deck.

"See you further first!" roared Romney in response, with a volley of oaths.

"All right, boys!" said the captain of the Mist Witch, turning to his men. "They evidently want a little more dressing down. Wear her around, Salty, and let go with Mr. Long Tom Barker. No more small fry for the Mist Witch, with a king's ship at her mercy!"

The maneuver was duly and swiftly executed; but before the contemplated raking shot could be delivered—and it would have been a terrible one at such close quarters—the British commander, after a hurried consultation with his officers, was seen to hold up his sword.

"Hold off, Fog-eye!" ordered Dareall, as the lanky gunner, having sighted his piece, stood with lighted fuse in readiness to touch it off. "The Britisher evidently intends to take his gruel without further cooking."

Then, springing again to the taffrail, he shouted once more:

"Do you surrender?"

"Yes," was this time the surly response.

"Strike your cursed flag, then, or I'll shoot it out of the balliards!"

The flaunting Union Jack was slowly and reluctantly lowered, and his Majesty's brig Hector was a prize to the erstwhile Yankee fishing-smack Mist Witch.

Dick Dareall at once boarded her and received the formal surrender, which was made with a bad enough grace by the British commander, both of whose eyes were badly blackened by the knock-down blow he had received an hour or so previous.

"Allow me to ask, Mr. Dareall," said Romney, after the American flag had been run up on the captured brig, "if your schooner is in commission?"

"She is not, sir," was the reply. "Thus far we have been fighting everything British on our own hook."

"Then you cannot demand my sword of me!" exclaimed Romney, with an air of relief.

Dareall laughed in his face.

"But I do demand it of you just the same," he retorted, with a look that was significant enough. "So hand it over on the spot."

This was reluctantly done.

"These other gentlemen are at liberty to retain their swords," continued Dareall, with a glance around upon Romney's subordinate officers, "as brave men, albeit the enemies of my country. And, as for you, Lieutenant Romney, in that you are likewise doubtless a brave and capable officer in the service of your king, I might also request you to accept the return of your sword at my hands." He paused, looking the lieutenant steadily in the eye with his falcon gaze.

The latter, anticipating the return of his sword, bowed stiffly, and held out his hand.

"But," continued the young man, sternly, "in

that you are likewise a murderous hound, who would so willingly have hanged me, a rescued castaway in your hands, through personal motives, and in violation of the immemorial hospitalities of the sea, it suits me to make an exception of you in this case—thus!"

He broke the sword in twain between his strong hands, and cast the fragments into the sea.

Romney turned livid, but merely stepped over to join the group of his fellow-officers, without saying a word.

His reticence was wise, inasmuch as there was something in Captain Dick's look and manner that promised badly for his personal safety, should he have been less prudent.

It was now past noon, the strange engagement in the fog having lasted something more than two hours, and the day was a magnificent one, with the wind shifting to the east.

The crew of the brig were quickly disarmed, after which a prize-crew, consisting of more than half the schooner's ship's-company, with Dauntless Dick himself in command, was clapped aboard, and sail at once made for Barnegat Bay, with the Mist Witch leading the way.

But, in the course of an hour or two, Lieutenant Romney, who felt himself to have been terribly humiliated before his fellow-captives, so far lost control of himself as to say:

"Captain Dareall, you yourself wear a sword." With a contemptuous glance at the rusty weapon with which the young commander had provided himself on resuming command of the Mist Witch.

"True," was the cold reply. "And I am happy to say that I am acquainted with its use."

"I am glad of it. When we get ashore, within the jurisdiction of the British lines under Sir Henry Clinton, it will enable me to demand of you the satisfaction that is my due."

A peculiar smile flitted over Captain Dareall's lips.

"With pleasure, when we are within those lines together," was replied. "But," with a glance that included all of Romney's companions as his auditors, "it is very evident that you gentlemen are not well up with the latest war news."

"What is it, sir?" called out Midshipman Harker, who had been treated with exceptional kindness by Dareall since the capture. "We had been to sea for more than a fortnight, and I, for one, am just pining away for information."

"It is just this: Clinton is in full retreat from Philadelphia to New York, and General Washington is pursuing him across the State of New Jersey, in the hope of bringing him to battle. There is yet more than this: Definite news has arrived of a treaty of alliance, offensive and defensive, effected by Dr. Franklin in Paris, between the United States and France, and of the departure of a French fleet and army for America."

There was the ring of truth in the announcement—which, indeed, accurately set forth the military situation at that time—and Dareall, having made it, turned and left the group to their reflections.

Barnegat Bay was entered at Barnegat Inlet, between Long Beach and Island Beach, and then, with a favoring wind, they made the little port of Tom's River before sunset.

This was the home of Dauntless Dick and the majority of his men, and was, moreover, held by two companies of New Jersey militia, under Captain Sedley.

Great was the rejoicing when the news of the brig's capture became noised abroad. Bonfires were lighted, and the countryfolk came trooping in from far and near to behold the prize and shower their congratulations upon the victors.

But, after turning over his prisoners to the custody of the militia captain, Dareall, leaving Sam, or Salty, Junk in command of both schooner and prize, set out at once for his mother's cottage, which was on the upper bay shore, about a mile away.

He was an only son, his father having perished by shipwreck some years before. But, brought up though he had been among rough sailor and fisher folk, Dick Dareall had been enabled to obtain an education far in advance of his surroundings, his family being an excellent one and of considerable means. And, sailor that he was, his quiet boast of his ability to use the sword had been no empty one. An old Spaniard, now no more, who had lived at Tom's River for many years, had taken a fancy to Dick when the latter was a mere boy (he was now twenty-six), and instructed him in the art of fence and many other things, including a knowledge of several of the foreign languages; while several years' schooling at Philadelphia had furnished the youth with an educational groundwork which a miscellaneous reading of all the solid literature within his reach had greatly widened, notwithstanding that most of his life was spent upon the water. The Mist Witch was his own property, inherited from his father, and from the very first he had been a leader and a person of consequence along the coast, though still regarded disdainfully as

"only a fisherman" by the landed gentry of the interior, of whom "Squire" Collingford, already alluded to, was a representative.

The Widow Dareall was a stately woman of more than middle age, with an old-time dignity of manner, and, as the owner of several slaves, besides a considerable estate, lived in no little style for the period.

She received her son, whom she idolized, with the earnest but controlled tenderness to which he was accustomed, and then listened in silence, but with glistening eyes, to the story of his recent adventures.

"God be praised that I still have you with me!" she murmured, fervently. "But tell me, Richard, do you not apprehend further trouble from Mr. Collingford, who is so rich and powerful, besides being your inveterate foe? And will not this capture of the brig aggravate him yet more against you?"

"He had better apprehend further trouble from me!" replied the young man, clinching his hand.

"Still, he is so influential with the Britishers, should they once get full control of New Jersey, and of the coast-line hereabouts. And when he mentioned your name this morning—"

"What!" interrupted Dick, indignantly; "did the dastard venture here, after lashing me upon the derelict to die?"

CHAPTER V.

BY MOONLIGHT.

"Yes," replied Mistress Dareall, "Mr. Collingford was here for a few moments while riding up to the Hall, after leaving his yacht in the cove. But, of course, I could know nothing of his having treated you so barbarously."

"What did he have to say?" moodily demanded Dick.

"Oh, he was kind and affable with me, as usual, for you know his mother and I were the best of friends, though Annabel Collingford did put on a good many airs at times."

"But, what did he say about me, mother?"

"He merely deplored the fact of your continuing to be a rebel, as he called it."

"Humph! And not a word of his having picked me up at sea the night before?"

"Not a word."

"Well—never mind. How is Jessie, mother?"

"She was here, with her cousin, Mistress Goldheart, at noon, and was looking lovely."

"Miss Goldheart is again living with the Dearborns, then?"

"Yes. It is no longer safe at her father's estate, up near Freehold, where Washington is hanging on the retreating Britishers' rear, and both her father and brother are with the American troops, as you know. So, Mrs. Goldheart and Naomi are down here with the Dearborns until things are more settled, if, indeed, they ever will be." And the widow sighed.

"Good!" exclaimed Dick, reflectively. "Let us now have supper, my dear mother, and I will then run up to see Jessie. What! you say Washington is already at Freehold?"

"Yes, or near there," replied the widow, leading the way into the dining-room, where the evening meal was awaiting them, "such is the report; and I believe a battle is imminent thereabouts."

"Better and better!" observed the young man, rubbing his hands contentedly as they took their seats at the table, with a neatly-dressed slave-woman in attendance. "I shall be in time before the battle, I hope."

"In time for what, my son?" And the widow looked disturbed. "Surely you will not rush immediately into fresh danger?"

"Oh, no, mother, not especially," replied Dick, cheerily. "Don't look alarmed unnecessarily, dearest mamma. But, I must carry my report of the capture of the war-brig to General Washington in all haste. And for what, think you? Why, to obtain his indorsement for a letter-of-marque commission from the Congress, mother; enough of this coast and inlet freebooting for me! In less than a week I hope to be on blue water as a duly accredited privateer."

"What! in the little Mist Witch?"

"That, until I can capture me a craft that will serve me better. The fogs are still frequent along Barnegat, mother," Dick looked up with a laugh from the repast, which he was enjoying with a sailor's heartiness of appetite, "and it won't be long before British armed ships will be moving up in the bay here, seeking revenge upon the bold captors of the Hector."

"Well, my son?"

"Well, who knows but their crack new schooner, the Cormorant, that we have heard so much about, may be one of them?"

"The great newly-captured, and newly-armed speeder from the Boston shipyards, which they have been fitting out at New York?"

"The same."

"And what then, my son?"

Dick laughed again as he rose from the table.

"What then, mother?" he repeated gayly.

"Could there be any better flyer than that same great schooner to transfer the little Mist Witch's name and flag to on a letter-of-marque cruise

against the whole British marine, armed, merchant and otherwise? But, kiss me now, and give me your blessing, dearest mother. I must be off, and you won't see me again until I shall have had my interview with General Washington."

The widow embraced and blessed him, and it was only when he had gone, and with the warmth of his manly farewell kiss upon her lips, that she gave way, and, sinking upon her knees in the solitude of her chamber, sobbingly commended him and his country's cause to the God of justice and of right.

Those were "the times that tried men's souls," but they were also, as is ever the case, the times that wrung women's hearts, whose dearest offerings—whether as son, husband, father, brother—were laid resignedly, if weepingly, upon the altar of the country's cause.

As for the young commander of the Mist Witch, upon quitting the house, he followed the broad sandy road that led straight northward along the marshy bay shore.

The Dearborn homestead was in that direction, a mile and a half away, and every foot of the ground was familiar to him from his earliest boyhood, when Jessie Dearborn, the fair daughter of the house, had been his playmate, as she was now his affianced bride.

It was a glorious night, with a full moon silencing the earth and waters with her clear, vitreous light.

Midway upon his road, the young man paused, and moodily contemplated a large and noble-looking old manor-house that crowned a considerable eminence a mile or two inland, its park-like grounds and outlying cultivated lands marking it as the seat of a wealthy colonial estate.

"Collingford Hall!" muttered Dareall. "Accursed Tory nest! Oh, that some overt act of treason to our cause would enable me to bring the heartless young squire to the hangman's noose! He would have drowned me, drowned me like a dog on that crazy wreck, and—well, I shall yet live to see him hanged, rich and powerful as he is, I trust."

He resumed his path, chasing away the resentful thoughts with rosy anticipations of his meeting with his sweetheart, from whom he had been separated for three whole days.

The road led straight past the homestead, which occupied a slight rise at the edge of the broad, salty-smelling sea-marshes skirting the bay, from which a wide inlet, crossed by a substantial rustic bridge, thrust its ragged way glitteringly backward into the land.

The road was sparsely lined at intervals with pine and hemlock trees.

On approaching this bridge, Dick Dareall suddenly came to a halt, and then waited grimly, with his hand on the hilt of his sword.

A man, who had apparently quitted the homestead gate a moment before, was hurriedly crossing the bridge from the opposite direction, in an angry and tumultuous mood.

His face and figure were plainly visible in the bright moonlight.

They were those of a powerfully-built, comely young fellow belonging to the higher walks of life. His shoe-buckles were of silver. The lace at his breast and wrists was apparently of a costly quality. He was elaborately dressed in the expensive fashion of the time, and there was a twinkle of jewels in the belt of the long sword at his side. The face, that of a man of thirty, was regularly and proudly featured, but indicative of violent and poorly-restrained passions—a handsome, and yet an unprincipled face, you would say. In fact, the individual, at first glance, would have been considered eminently handsome and distinguished-looking, but for a disfiguring birthmark, which made a lurid ring almost completely around his throat from ear to ear, as if left there by a throttling cord!

There was a physiological reason for this mark, for this man's mother had, in a fit of temporary aberration, attempted to hang herself a few months antecedent to his birth.

Captain Dick, who was partly in the shadow of some trees, suddenly stepped out into the man's path so as to violently jostle him.

The latter uttered a furious exclamation, and straightway laid his hand upon his sword, in a prompt manner that betrayed a familiarity with its use; but, recognizing Dareall, he suddenly reeled back, as if appalled.

He had grown livid, his chin dropped, his knees knocked together.

"Dareall—Dick Dareall!" he gasped. "What! not drowned—not dead—still alive to thwart and baffle me?"

"Yes," was the contemptuous reply, "and very much alive, no thanks to you, murderous villain. Come, 'Squire Collingford, come!'"

And, drawing his sword, Dareall smote the other with the flat of the blade.

Collingford drew himself together, and then a cruel, exultant smile crossed his lips.

He was reckoned one of the best swordsmen in America.

"Have your wish," he said, coldly. "Nothing could suit me better."

Then there was the flash of another unsheathing, and the swords crossed each other in the moonlight.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DUEL WITHOUT A CHALLENGE.

BUT, if Tory George Collingford was reckoned one of the best swordsmen in America, old Pedro Gavazzo, the ex-buccaneer, from whom Dick Dareall had received his lessons in the fencing art, had been reckoned without an equal in that line in either Spain or France.

There were a score or more lightning-like passes and parries, in which 'Squire Collingford, much to his alarm, found his best skill at naught.

Then his opponent, from acting on the defensive, suddenly pressed him with such a hurricane of an assault that he was completely taken off his guard.

There was a last desperate exchange, the wrenching twist of an iron wrist, and Collingford's sword flew far out of his grasp at the same instant that his heels tripped upon a projecting tree-root, causing him to fall flat on his back.

Dareall's sword-point was at his throat.

"Do you sue for your life?" he sternly demanded.

"Yes," was the sullen response.

"Get up!" contemptuously; and then, as the other bewilderedly regained his feet: "Do you know why I give you the life you sue for?"

"No."

Dareall pointed sneeringly at the other's neck.

"What is that mark encircling your throat?" he mocked. "And what did your school-fellows call you by reason of it, and of your violent, cruel temper, when you were a boy?"

Collingford flushed so deeply from brow to neck that the mark was blotted out by the mantling color, and then paled so lividly that it stood out with increased distinctness.

"Rope-mark Collingford!" sneered Dareall. "That was it. Well, you are not worth a brave man's sword-thrust; I reserve you for the hangman's cord."

He then turned, returning his sword to its scabbard, and strode away.

Regaining his own weapon, Collingford looked after him with a face that was nothing less than diabolical.

"Accursed fisherman-mudsill!" he hissed. "Will nothing kill him? And must I, a born aristocrat, with the best blood of the Colonies in my veins—the ancient blood of the Romneys and the Collingfords—still writhe under the thought that Jessie Dearborn prefers such as he to such as I? Wait, wait, wait! Romney is coming with his armed brig, and General Clinton is about to sweep Washington and his armed rabble from the face of this province in the battle that is threatening. I will glut my revenge yet, even if a fulfillment of his accursed rope-mark prophecy is the cost!"

He then went away in the direction of his stately hall, after noting, with a fresh jealous twinge, that his victorious rival had entered the Dearborn homestead gate.

But 'Squire Collingford had heard nothing as yet of the fate of Romney's armed brig, and was also sadly out in his venomous forecast as to the result of the impending battle, or his revengeful reflections might have been of a less exultant nature for the time being.

In the mean time the click of the gate-latch, as Captain Dick entered the homestead garden, had called a beautiful young woman out upon the moonlit steps of the porch.

"Jessie!" cried the young man, softly; "my own darling!"

She had hesitated strangely, but his voice reassured her.

"Dick, Dick!" she exclaimed, hysterically, while rushing into his arms; "I had half-believed you drowned. He assured me of it."

"Who?" he demanded, when their first transports were somewhat moderated. "But you mean that detestable scoundrel Collingford, of course?"

"Yes; he quitted us but a short time ago. He said he saw you drifting away far out at sea in a small boat last night, and found it impossible to pick you up."

"Humph! the villain! but he did pick me up, though, and with a vengeance. What else did he have to say?"

"Nothing but to press his odious suit upon me afresh, but you can depend upon it he won't do so again in a hurry."

"Well, he did look as if he had something of a flea in his ear when I tackled him back yonder in the road."

"What! you have crossed swords with Mr. Collingford?"

Jessie Dearborn clasped her hands.

"Yes; and I half-regret that I spared him for the hangman when I had him flat on his back, with my sword's point at his throat. But, take me into the house, Jessie. There is great news to tell, and I might as well make one story of it for your mother and Mistress Goldheart, besides yourself, for I hear that your rich cousin is with you once again."

"Yes, both Cousin Naomi and Aunt Martha are with us again. Come in."

And she led the way into the house.

Like her lover, Jessie Dearborn was fatherless and an only child.

She was also but three years his junior. Their

engagement had been a long one, "dating from the very beginning of the war. Jessie was such a patriot that she had vowed not to marry until peace should be declared, with her country's independence assured; and her lover had been compelled, howsoever unwillingly, to acquiesce in her determination, for, though a beauty and most amiable, she was a young woman of a resolution as powerful and unyielding as his own.

Her mother was in fairly well-to-do circumstances for the times, being the possessor of a large farm, with enough slaves to work it profitably; though, of course, as with pretty much every one else, except perhaps in the case of some of the large-landed proprietors, the comparative impoverishment induced by the war was everywhere more or less apparent about the place.

The young Knight of the Deck soon told the story of his exciting adventures to the company in the Widow Dearborn's parlor, which, besides Jessie and her mother, consisted of the lady relatives referred to.

These latter, Mrs. Martha Goldheart and her daughter, Naomi, were rich and proud persons from the interior of Monmouth county, who were inclined to be more or less patronizing with respect to the Dearborns, and yet more disposed, strange to say, to imagine that Jessie was somewhat lowering herself in her engagement with gallant, knightly, self-made Dick Dareall, the master-fisherman's son, though they were mostly careful to keep this opinion to themselves.

They were, however, intensely patriotic, or at least the mother was, and therefore sufficiently ready to have their admiration challenged by the brilliant achievement of the little Mist' Witch, as related with becoming modesty by the young commander.

Moreover, Mrs. Goldheart's husband was a colonel on General Washington's personal staff, while their only son, Herber, was captain of a company in the Jersey Blues, already a famous regiment in the Continental Army of the North.

"I wonder that you are alive after so many hair-breadth escapes, Mr. Dareall," was Mrs. Goodheart's rather stately comment, when the exciting narrative was finished. "And so you are going to General Washington with your report of this affair, you say?"

"Yes, ma'm," was the reply, "this very night, after I shall have once more visited my men on board of the Mist' Witch, and left some final instructions for them during my absence."

"That is well, Mr. Dareall. I doubt not that General Washington will compliment you highly on your achievement."

"I want something more than compliments, ma'm," returned Dick, bluntly. "I give to my country a British armed brig, comparatively uninjured, and full of prisoners, provisions and munitions of war—a pretty fair gift, as you must allow, even against the prize-money that will be our due. In return, I want something more than compliments, which are empty enough and cost nothing. I want a letter-of-marque commission to fight, capture, burn, pillage or destroy, as the case may be, on the bonny blue water in my country's cause."

"Ah! I see—as a privateer?" With a dubious inflection on the word.

"Exactly, ma'm."

"Well, Mr. Dareall," with condescending affability, "you may have some difficulty in gaining private word with General Washington. In that case," quite grandly, "you are at liberty in using our name, and Colonel Goldheart, who is on the general's staff, will doubtless help you through."

"Thanks, ma'm," with cold respectfulness, "but I shall hardly need his assistance. I have reason to believe that General Washington is already aware of certain services of myself and my men 'round about Barnegat here during the past two years, so that he can scarcely be a stranger to my name."

Mrs. Goldheart frowned, and stared at him with a haughty look.

"For my part," hastily interposed Mrs. Dearborn, a lovable, middle-aged dame, with much of her daughter's fair beauty in her sweet face, "let us merely hope that Dick will get his commission. He deserves it, if any man in the world does."

"And, of course, he'll get it!" cried Jessie, enthusiastically, with a devouring look upon her lover's manly comeliness. "Why, they ought to fetch it to him, unasked, instead of his going for it!"

Dick rewarded her with a slight smile, and then, turning abruptly to her cousin, asked:

"What do you think, Mistress Naomi?"

CHAPTER VII.

THE TENTED FIELD.

NAOMI GOLDHEART had listened to the gallant recital with profound interest and in silence, and she had abstained from all voluntary comment.

She was a year or two younger than her cousin, and of a darkly haughty type of beauty, while Jessie, besides being very fair, was no less unconscious than unpretentious in her charms, which were by that reason the more engaging.

She hesitated at the question being so abruptly put to her, and then replied, coldly:

"I suppose I think that you are a pretty brave man, Mr. Dareall."

"Thank you, Mistress Goldheart!" observed Dareall, effusively. She had always addressed him as 'Dick' theretofore. "Perhaps even Mr. Romney would agree with you on that point, could you consult with him, as no doubt you would like to."

A deep blush suffused for an instant the dark beauty of the young woman's face, while both her mother and aunt stared and her cousin looked troubled, but she did not attempt or condescend to any retort.

Dick now took his leave.

"What is up with your cousin?" he asked of Jessie, who accompanied him to the gate. "Can she really be in love with the Britisher?"

"I am afraid so, Dick."

"But she is so patriotic, and has heretofore affected to despise him."

"Who can read a woman's heart, Dick?"

"It depends upon the heart and the reader," responded her lover, gayly taking her in his arms, and kissing her with all his accustomed heartiness. "I can read yours like a book, my darling, and, thank the Lord! with the most perfect satisfaction to myself."

"I don't know how it is, but ever since that last visit of Lieutenant Romney to the Goldheart homestead in Mr. Collingford's company, she has seemed dreamy and abstracted, for all her professed derision of the Britisher's passion, by fits and starts."

"Humph!" observed Dick. "Neither Britisher nor Tory, I fancy, would have had much comfort in their visit had either Colonel or Captain Goldheart been on hand. I wonder that even her mother put up with it."

"Aunt Martha is very much under Naomi's control, though perhaps without knowing it."

"Still, in spite of her infernal pride, the old lady's patriotism is doubtless sincere."

Jessie laughed.

"She would be sincere in something else, I am afraid, if she should overhear you speaking of her as an old lady," she replied. "However, let it all go, Dick. What can it matter to us?"

"True; but I shall take extra precautions as to the security of my chief prisoner just the same, besides putting Captain Sedley on his guard."

"What do you mean, Dick?"

"Oh, there's no telling what a determined young woman might not attempt for a lover in distress, and it's ten to one that she would accept any aid on the part of that Tory villain, Collingford, as being the gentleman's kinsman."

The blonde beauty of Jessie Dearborn's sweet face assumed a stern expression.

"If I thought," she said, slowly, as if half to herself, "that my cousin would dare to hold any secret communication with that man while under our roof, knowing how I dislike and fear him as your chief enemy, Dick— But no matter!"

And her brow quickly cleared as her lover once more snatched her to his heart in a parting embrace.

"No more, no more!" he cried, gayly. "Nothing more at this last moment but this, and this, and this!" kissing her repeatedly.

"Jessie, my true love! when you next see me, it should be with at least the promise of my rover's commission in my pocket. And thenceforth the wide ocean is my field, and you are in the prospective a bold privateersman's bride!"

"Ah!" sadly, and still clinging to him fondly; "and with what fresh suspense and anxieties! But when shall you be back from General Washington's camp, dearest?"

"Soon, soon, soon! By this time to-morrow evening, I trust. But all will depend. I shall see Junk, now, then Sedley, with regard to the prisoners; then I must have a few hours' sleep, and I should be off for Freehold before day-break. Good-by, my angel!"

"But stay, Dick. Are you sure the militia captain will be able to keep so many prisoners secure?"

"Oh, without a doubt, if he is only wide awake, as he looks to be."

"Where are they confined?"

"In the old schoolhouse, which he uses as a barrack for his company. There is a password already arranged, so that no outsider could pass the sentries without it."

"A password!" Her woman's curiosity was instantly aroused. "How romantic! Tell it to me, Dick."

"With all my heart!" And then, lowering his voice: "Valley Forge."

"Ah, it is a good word—or rather two in one. But must you go now, Dick?"

"Right away—this instant! Good-by, and God keep you, my love, my life!"

"Ah, my darling, but you go into new dangers—you will require His guardianship more than I."

"I don't know about that. Look out for Collingford!"

There was a last embrace, and then Dick fair-

ly ran off down the road, to escape the temptation of lingering yet longer.

After following him with her eyes till she could see him no longer, Jessie slowly retraced her steps up the garden walk, and reëntered the house.

As she did so a concealed listener stepped out of the laurels overshadowing the gate, and looked abstractedly down the moonlit road.

A graceful and queenly figure—the figure of Naomi Goldheart!

"Valley Forge!" she muttered, softly, with a half-smile on her lovely but resolute lips. "Yes, a good word, or two in one, to be sure! But then, so is any word when it is a pass word."

Then she also reëntered the house, though with due secrecy, and not by the main entrance.

As for the commander of the Mist Witch, he carried out the preliminaries he had set forth to his sweetheart, and an hour before daybreak, after a four-hours' sleep on board the schooner, was on the road, headed for Freehold, thirty miles away, accompanied by Fog-eye Flinders.

He took the gunner with him for luck, as you might say, no less than for company's sake.

Fog-eye had contributed so greatly to nearly all his successes against the enemy on the coast, that Dick had come to look upon him as his good genius; and, moreover, the lanky possessor of the exceptional optics was very anxious to accompany his skipper on an expedition that might afford him a glimpse of the great General Washington, whom he regarded as little less than a god in cocked hat and top-boots, and who was still the trusted hero of the army and common people, notwithstanding the attempts in certain influential and envious quarters to supersede him in the chief command by General Gates, the captor of Burgoyne.

Both men were well-mounted, the June weather was superb, the roads in fair condition, and, a couple of hours after sunrise, they sighted Washington's camp on a series of rolling grounds, interspersed with pine woods, to the left of the village of Freehold.

Two or three miles to the northward, on the Keyport road, could be seen the camp of the rear of the retreating Redcoats and Hessians, under General Clinton.

After an exhausting march of twenty miles from the southwestern border of Monmouth county, both armies, pursuers and pursued, and about equally worn out, had come to camp within this brief distance of each other, on the preceding night.

Dick, with his companion, was permitted to pass the American outposts on his bare but earnest statement that he was the bearer of important intelligence for the commander-in-chief.

Then, a little further on, at the second line of pickets, an orderly sergeant took them in charge, and conducted them to the farm-house which Washington had selected as his headquarters, all the time eying the pair with the keenest suspicion, for Tory spies were numerous and in every imaginable disguise.

CHAPTER VIII. AT HEADQUARTERS.

"CAP," growled Fog-eye Flinders, not a little discontentedly, though under his breath, "this little land-lubber in the ragged monkey clothes seems to think we're going to steal one of the tents, or make off with them horses as is bow-lined to the trees."

"Hush!" cautioned Dick; "I suppose they have to be particular on account of spies, and I fancy that a battle is imminent."

As for himself, he was too much occupied with sympathy for the brave and devoted, but unkempt and half-starved-looking troops among whose tents and camp-fires they were being conducted to think of much else.

Comparatively fresh from the sufferings of their terrible winter at Valley Forge, and with Congress only recently reinstated in Philadelphia by the British evacuation thereof by this retreat to the eastward, in order to reunite their two main armies at the mouth of the Hudson, and furthermore exhausted by this hurried pursuing march across New Jersey, the heroic Continentals presented a distressing appearance. All were ragged, and many of them shoeless, either barefoot or with their feet wrapped up in dusty bandages, or improvised sandals made of rabbit, squirrel and muskrat-skins laced up with deer-hide thongs. Nor was the appearance of the company officers much better than that of the men, though the painstaking care of some of them in endeavoring to spruce up in their half-soleless boots, battered cocked hats and tattered regimentals was pitifully pathetic. Then the few tents that could be mustered were likewise dilapidated and torn, while the soldiers' breakfasts that were boiling or toasting at the ends of ramrods over the fires were of the meagerest description.

Still, in all this impoverishment, there was noticeable a hopefulness in the faces of one and all, as though the dawning of a new day had been but recently glimpsed after the long night of discouragement and hopes deferred. Indeed,

these devoted men could now occasionally jest with each other, even if still half-starved, and now and then a rollicking song was trolled out in the fresh morning air at an open camp-fire or behind a ragged flap of canvas.

Notwithstanding that this was the first army camp he had ever entered, young Dareall, who was a man of naturally keen observation, at once divined the cause of this new hopefulness on the ruins of an unrelieved misery, so to speak. It was not that these ragged warriors were on the threshold of a great battle in which they were determined to redeem the black, discouraging past by a great victory over the invaders. No; it was because of the recently-received news of the treaty of alliance with France, and that a French fleet and army were already on their way to America. The infant nation was no longer isolated in her death-grapple for independence with the giant and insolent despotism of the British oligarchy. Help was at hand, the generous strong arm of help, stretched across the sea from La Belle France, the chivalric Bacchante of the nations of the earth, herself on the red threshold of Revolution, of Glory, and of Transformation, and the home-spun patriots of the New World were invigorated and renewed in their death-struggle for Liberty and the Right. That was the secret of it.

An agreeable surprise was awaiting the young commander of the Mist Witch at General Washington's headquarters.

After the orderly had passed into the house with his report of the visitors in waiting, and while the sentry, stalking back and forth before the entrance with a surly and uncompromising look for the two horsemen who had dismounted and were waiting patiently at the outer gate, Colonel Goldheart, with whom Dick had only a slight-acquaintance, from having seen him once or twice at the Dearborn homestead years before, came out upon the porch.

Much to Dick's astonishment, this officer, as soon as he caught sight of him, came hurrying down the walk and eagerly seized his hand.

"Captain Dareall, the captor of the Hector!" he exclaimed; "this is an unexpected pleasure. Welcome, and thrice welcome!"

"What, sir!" cried the young man, delighted; "my news has preceded me, then?"

"It has. It was brought over by a couple of your Tom's River townsmen early last night, while we were going into camp here. Why, my friend, you are among your admirers without knowing it. There is not a man in our little army who does not know of and rejoice in your achievement. A gallant, a desperate deed! I suppose you are here with the particulars?"

"Yes, colonel; that is just what I am here for."

"Come in, then. The general must have finished his breakfast by this time, and will be glad to see you. By the way," pausing, with a glance at Fog-eye, as Dick was about following him up the walk with much alacrity, "an attendant of yours, I suppose," lowering his voice, "the remarkably lanky individual with the fishy eyes?"

"It is Fog-eye Flinders, my right bower—perhaps with the single exception of Salty Junk, my second in command," replied Dick, proudly. "It is largely to him that the little Mist Witch's successes have been due. You speak of his having fishy eyes. Well, sir, there are none others like them in the world in the head of man, lynx or eagle. They can look through and through a fog that would blank-wall any other man to within a foot of his face, and sight a deck-gun straight for the heart of oak, every time. Come here, Fog-eye, and be introduced to Colonel Goldheart."

The colonel did not seem to relish this very greatly, but smiled urbanely as Flinders slouched forward, and acquitted himself very creditably by saying as little as possible.

He was then given in charge of the orderly, to be taken to breakfast, while the horses were also attended to.

Dareall was then again proceeding up the walk with Colonel Goldheart, when a smooth-faced, very engaging-looking young officer, of not more than twenty or twenty-one, and in a very brilliant uniform, came out on the porch, attended by several other officers of obviously lesser rank.

They were speaking French together, and there was something so airy and graceful and distinguished, and yet enthusiastic withal, about the younger and principal figure of the group, that the young sea-knight found himself instantly more or less fascinated.

"What a dashing, beautiful man!" he exclaimed, under his breath, at the same time pausing and catching his companion's arm. "Who is it, sir?"

The answer both astonished and delighted him, though he might have anticipated it, so dear to the popular heart had already become the subject of his query.

"Major-General the Marquis de la Fayette," was the reply. "Come, for he is likewise enthusiastic over your daring exploit."

"This gentleman, indeed," thought the young

Sea Witch commander, as he followed his guide mechanically, and not a little diffidently, up the steps, "looks as if he might be enthusiastic over any and everything good and noble and brave."

The effusive Lafayette, on being made acquainted with the hero of the deck, was not content with grasping his hand, but threw his arms around him and embraced him fervently, while his Gallic companions were scarcely less demonstrative.

"Oh, it was gallant, it was superb!" he cried, in his broken English—which was speedily mended, however, as he continued in the service of the country in order that he might fight his country's hereditary foe. "My friend, you will be great, you will shine, you will coruscate among the rising orbs of this young and brave nation, of which you are so fortunate as to be a native! You should have command of a national vessel at once—a man-of-war, a frigate, a ship of the line!"

Dick finally made his escape into the house, blushing like a school-girl, and with the pressure of the marquis's soft hand lingering in his hard palm like a caress.

"The marquis is very young," whispered Colonel Goldheart, half-apologetically. "But he has already made himself extremely useful, and is very popular."

"I don't wonder at it," muttered Dick in a yet lower voice, for they were now at the door of a large room which he instinctively felt to be the threshold of his hopes. "That young man's amiable presence would civilize a herd of barbarians."

They then entered.

A number of officers, some of them with charts before them, were grouped about a table at which one man was seated with his legs crossed, and great blunted silver spurs at the heels of his huge, brilliantly-polished top-boots.

This man was large-framed and nobly-featured, with enormous hands and feet, and yet with an unmistakable greatness of presence that at once impressed the beholder powerfully.

Upon Colonel Goldheart's mentioning his young companion's name, this central figure at once arose, advanced a step, and grasping the young sailor's hand, spoke a few words of earnest approval in a grave, sweet voice, and with a complimentary inclination of his majestic head.

Dauntless Dick was greatly confused at first, and felt like raising the huge hand he was grasping to his lips.

He was at last in the presence of the Father of his Country.

CHAPTER IX.

AN HISTORIC BATTLE.

"YOUR news has preceded you, Captain Dareall," said the commander-in-chief, signing the young man to a seat while resuming his own. "You have doubtless come to give me the particulars of this gallant affair?"

Dick replied in the affirmative.

"Proceed, then," continued General Washington, "I shall listen to you with pleasure, but must caution you to be concise, as we are about to attack the enemy's rear, and there will doubtless be a sharp engagement."

The young commander at once told his story in the simplest and most straightforward manner, without the least verbiage or embellishment.

He was listened to in silence and with rapt attention by the commander-in-chief and his assembled staff-officers, La Fayette and his French companions also joining the group of auditors soon after the beginning of the narration, and remaining interestedly throughout.

When the murmur of compliments had died away at its conclusion, General Washington said, with something less than his accustomed impassiveness:

"Sir, you have served your country well in this gallant deed. I have no doubt that, when the necessary appraisement of your capture can be made, your prize-money will be forthcoming to yourself and your companion."

"Thank you, general," replied Dick, who had by this time recovered all his native independence of thought and speech, "but I care nothing for that. And it was for nothing of the sort that I have thus reported in person to you."

"For what then, pray?"

"To entreat a more immediate and different sort of reward, sir."

Washington slightly frowned.

"You serve your country in the hope of a reward, then?"

"Yes, sir," boldly—"for the opportunity to serve her in a larger and more useful field."

The frown disappeared.

"There is the true ring in those words, young man. What do you want?" demanded Washington.

"Your written recommendation for a letter-of-marque commission from the Congress. I have been a coast man through the war, thus far; I long for blue water and a staunch privateer's timbers under my feet."

"Ah! to what end?"

"To serve my country wheresoever wind blows or billow leaps; to capture, burn, pillage or destroy as the case may be, or circumstance may dictate."

There was a general smile throughout the room, in which, however, the commander-in-chief did not participate, as he gravely turned to the table and took up a pen.

"But wait," said he, pausing. "You have not a ship."

"I shall take one," was the characteristic response.

"Your Mist Witch is too small for an all-round privateer, I suppose?"

"Altogether, sir."

"How would the armed brig answer that you have just captured?"

"Not at all, general! She is tub-built, with a cock-a-loft stern and a bow on her like the bulge of a wine-vat. I want a good one and a flyer. There'll be plenty enough British craft poking around in old Barnegat presently in search of the swallowed Hector and her seventy men, including Lieutenant Romney and his gold-laced satellites. I'll take my pick of 'em at leisure."

There was another smile, and General Washington forthwith wrote out and signed the recommendation as requested.

"Here, Captain Dareall," he said, gravely passing the paper, which was received with a becomingly grateful bow. "I now wish to ask you a few questions that have more than once occurred to me."

Dick bowed, and waited.

"How happens it that you have never enlisted in the service of your country—you and your comrades?"

"Well, sir," replied Dick, growing somewhat embarrassed, "we think we have served, off and along Barnegat—or you might say from Great Egg Harbor clean up to Squam—though perhaps somewhat irregularly."

"Ah!"

"Yes, general," recovering his assurance rapidly. "For, from the beginning of the war, what do you think the little Mist Witch has done? Captured, burnt or confiscated," he began, telling off the score on his fingers, "twenty-four smacks, nineteen sloops or schooners—most of 'em provision boats—twelve store-ships of various rigs and tonnage, eight large transports (home-bound and empty), one small treasure-ship, and, lastly, the armed brig Hector, and every timbered son of 'em flying the British Union Jack, or owned or commanded by a self-confessed Tory. There you are, general. Not a bad showing, I fancy, and not much in the interests of King George III., either."

"Exactly. But confiscated? Did any of this confiscated property accrue to the advantage of our national treasury, which is so greatly in need of money as to be unable to pay our half-starved and less than half-clothed troops?"

Dick moved a little uneasily in his chair, and he hung his head.

The matter had never appeared to him in quite so strong a light before, and it seemed to him that that calm and grand face, under whose frown—it was a mock frown, by the way, but he couldn't know it at the moment—he was sitting, was as the countenance of an all but omnipotent judge calling him to account. Still, he rallied.

"Well, general," he said, "you see, before the war, we were fishermen and wreckers—along Barnegat; whereas since the war—since the war—"

"Ah, then! since the war?"

The young coast-man looked up with a frank laugh, that proved more or less infectious.

"Well, general, since the war the Britishers call us pirates, the Tories call us beach devils and freebooters, while in our own conceit we are merely poor fisher and sailor men, striking for the good cause in our own way, though now and then thinking of our own pockets, and hoping to do better as letter-of-marque privateersmen on blue water."

There was a general laugh, in which Washington failed to join, though his countenance had lost its severity of expression.

"At all events, Captain Dareall," said he, with a slight gesture indicating that the interview was terminated, "I would sooner have you and your men privateersmen than freebooters or wreckers, and you have the recommendation you requested."

"The brave youth!" cried La Fayette, pushing enthusiastically forward to once more embrace Dareall, as the latter arose; "he should have a line-of-battle ship! In Paris he would be a lion of the salons!"

Here there was a commotion at the door, and a booted and spurred messenger, covered with sweat and dust, entered with news from the remotest outposts.

Firing was already heard in the distance.

Washington rose with a significant gesture, and signed to his black body-servant for his sword and chapeau. In less than a minute the apartment was deserted.

When Captain Dick rejoined Flinders at the gate, where the refreshed horses were in readi-

ness, the commander-in-chief and his staff had galloped off, the camp was a thing of the past, column after column, squadron after squadron of the ragged but devoted Continentals were wheeling by on the quickstep, two regiments were already exchanging volleys with the Hessian rear-guard of the retreating Britishers, and the historic battle of Monmouth was begun.

"Fog-eye," exclaimed Dick, vaulting into the saddle, "if you've had breakfast, you're ahead of me. But, for all that, I am going to see how fighting is done on land, if I have to go through with the entire battle."

"I, too, or dash my toplights, Cap!" cried Flinders, imitating his example.

They spurred after a squad of cavalymen on the left of the Jersey Blues, that was hurrying to the front with long, swinging strides, and amid a chorus of huzzas.

The Hessians and four regiments of Redcoats were stretched out in an extended line across the fields and roadways but a mile away, with the village and a few tree-clumps between.

The space was quickly crossed by the main American force in serried lines, volleys being exchanged at every rod of the advance, with La Fayette coming up more slowly with the reserve, and a cavalry flanking movement on the right in operation under "Light Horse Harry Lee."

Men were falling faster and faster on either side, and the field-pieces began to get in their work.

Then there was a hurraing bayonet charge all along the line on the part of the Americans, and Dick and his companion lost sight of each other.

CHAPTER X.

AN UNEXPECTED DISAPPOINTMENT.

THE battle had lasted for several hours, and at last there were unmistakable signs of the British giving way.

At this juncture Dick, who had been mixing in the thickest of the fight with the keenest zest along with the squad to which he had attached himself from the first, had his horse killed under him.

As he strugglingly released his leg from under the fallen animal, the battle raging around him, he presented a rather formidable appearance.

Being an excellent shot, with a sort of passion for firearms, he had, besides doing good execution in the fray, busied himself with making a collection of such pistols as took his fancy from the bodies of fallen British officers, always making sure that they were loaded.

As a consequence, his belt at this juncture was fairly bristling with pistols of every size and description, and as the pistols of that day were nearly all of the huge holster variety, it may be readily imagined that he was pretty well weighted with his extra armament, besides cutting quite a warlike figure.

"Hallo, captain!" gayly cried an agreeable voice, not in the best English, as he gained his feet, sword in hand; "you are laying in a stock of small-arms for your forthcoming privateer, I see. And can you fight on land as well as on water?"

It was La Fayette who spoke, and who had come to a momentary pause, with his staff, a short distance away.

"Yes, general," replied Dick, coolly shooting down a Hessian as he spoke, "but not on horseback. A sailor fights best on his feet, I fancy, whether with the solid ground or a reeling deck underneath him. Hal! take care of yourself, general!"

There was a sudden charge of a considerable body of Hessians from out a neighboring thicket, the Continentals at that point momentarily giving way before them, and La Fayette was almost surrounded.

At the same time as Captain Dick sprung forward with waving sword, in lead of a knot of Americans who had failed to give way with their companions, a cannon-ball broke the up-lifted blade short off in his hand.

But a broken sword was of little consequence to such a born fighter as the coastman, with his fighting instinct at the fever pitch.

"Hurrah!" he shouted, snatching the musket, with its fixed bayonet, from the fallen Hessian, and rushing on to the general's assistance. "It's a boarding fight, and the enemy's decks should be ours!"

A bayonet-thrust disposed of the first soldier he encountered, his clubbed musket knocked down a second, and then, with the cumbersome weapon in his left hand, he snatched pistol after pistol from his belt, bringing down a mercenary at every shot, while his companions, inspired to frenzy by his example, were also doing wonders.

In a very few minutes the repulsed Continentals rallied effectively, while the Hessians had lost more than half their men.

They lay stretched out and piled up, looking more like travesty than real soldiers in their huge bearskin shakos and cumbersome equipments.

Then, before another and better-organized counter-charge, still led by Dick, the survivors broke and fled in the utmost precipitation, giving vent to German jabberings of fear as they ran, and were shot or cut down by the score before they could regain the wood.

This section of the field was then temporarily clear, though the bullets from the columns engaged not far away continued to whistle and sing and the cannon-balls to whiz overhead.

"Bravo!" shouted La Fayette, enthusiastically. "Come here, Monsieur Sailor-Soldier! you are a brave man—you have doubtless saved me from capture, and I want to thank you."

Accompanied by his staff and others, he was already spurring his way over the broken and dead-strewn field toward Dareall, who was now breathless from his exertions and with the last pistol gone from his erst laden belt.

As they drew rein around him, he looked up with dazed eyes in which he strove to deprecate the thanks promised him, when another and a graver voice spoke.

"Captain Dareall," said the voice, "I have chanced to witness your prowess. If I was too severe upon your antecedents at my headquarters, I am sorry for it. And should that recommendation fail of its object in securing your commission, pray don't hesitate to apply to me again."

Then Dick flushed proudly as he grasped an enormous ungloved hand that was extended down to him by a commanding figure on a powerful roan horse, and he even pressed his lips to that hand before it could be withdrawn.

Dear, indeed, to him might be the praise of such men as the distinguished Marquis de La Fayette, but doubly, incalculably precious was that of Washington himself; and the remembrance of that hand-pressure on the bloody field of Monmouth was ever thereafter a red-letter reminiscence in the unwritten volume of his checkered and adventurous life.

But before he could murmur his thanks an aide-de-camp came whirling up from the further side of the field with an important message on his lips, and both Washington and La Fayette spurred away, together with their staffs.

And now, scarcely a hundred yards off to the right, the Jersey Blues were seen in slow retreat before a sweeping bayonet assault on the part of a superior force of Redcoats and Hessians combined.

The company of Continentals which had just effected La Fayette's rescue under Dick's leadership were without an officer of their own, and still looked upon him as their temporary head.

He at once led them in a dashing charge upon the new enemy's flank. This stayed the latter's charge, the Blues made a successful stand, and for the moment there was desperate hand-to-hand fighting.

Then the Britishers fell slowly back, and Dick perceived the tall, lanky figure of Fog-eye Flinders assisting a captain of the Blues to his feet, while holding in one hand a musket whose bayonet was ruddily stained.

"What, Captain Goldheart!" exclaimed Dick, approaching, for he was better acquainted with Naomi's brother than with her father. "I hope it is well with you, sir."

"It is, thank you, Captain Dareall," replied the officer, shaking himself a bit. "But that I am not among the slain is solely owing to the self-sacrificing heroism of this brave fellow, whom I do not even know."

Dick made the necessary explanation, and Captain Goldheart grasped his preserver's hand.

"Mr. Flinders," said he, impressively, "I owe you my life. If ever you are in need of a friend, call on Herbert Goldheart, of the Jersey Blues."

He then hurried away to rejoin his company.

"Spike my guns," guffawed Fog-eye, with a pleased grin, "eff that ain't the fust time any gentleman ever called me Mister Flinders!"

The British were now almost everywhere in full retreat.

An hour later the Americans, too thoroughly exhausted to take up pursuit, were in undisturbed possession of the bloody field, and the battle of Monmouth was fought and won.

After a few hours' rest and refreshment, Dick and his companions were enabled to set out homeward on horses easily procured from the many riderless ones as a result of the hard-fought day.

A bitter and unexpected disappointment was in store for them.

They rode straight to the school-building used as the militia barracks as their first objective point, on reaching Tom's River, at about nine o'clock in the evening.

"I am sorry to have to report it, Dick," said Captain Sedley, after the first greetings had been exchanged. "But our chief prisoner has escaped."

"Escaped!" echoed Dick. "Romney?"

"Yes."

"When and how?"

"Some time early this morning, and I suspect that a young woman, who has disappeared with the prisoner, was concerned in it."

After a few more explanations, Dick galloped off instantly to the Dearborn homestead.

Naomi Goldheart had been missing since day-break, and there was no manner of doubt that she was both the means and the companion of the British lieutenant's flight.

CHAPTER XI.

A GREAT SCHOONER.

DICK, fresh from the battle, brought glorious news to the homestead, and Flinders was at the same time spreading the same encouraging intelligence throughout the village and the country-side.

Notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, new bonfires were soon blazing, throngs collecting, and General Washington's victory at Monmouth the rejoicing subject upon every lip.

But the joy of it all was not a little dampened at the Dearborns by the treasonable conduct of Jessie's beautiful cousin.

Mrs. Goldheart was in tears, the widow troubled and anxious, Jessie still brimming over with patriotic indignation and chagrin.

"I think I see it all now," she said to her lover. "Naomi must have been eavesdropping when you gave me the barracks password out yonder at the gate. At all events, she was not in the house when I reentered it after separating from you, though she came in by the back door a few minutes later—looking very composed and self-satisfied, as I now remember, though I thought nothing of it at the time. Those laurels by the gate would have furnished her with a capital concealment. Yes, yes; it is all plain now!"

She clasped her hands tightly together, and snapped her pretty teeth close shut.

"You are doubtless right," observed Dick. "But she was dressed as a man—as a young officer—when she used the password to pass the sentry at daybreak. How could she have managed that, Jessie?"

"Easily enough. She had a complete uniform of her brother's in her trunk, which she laughingly showed me when unpacking it the first day of her arrival here. Herbert, who has or had been gaining flesh very rapidly, it seems, had outgrown the suit, and Naomi had brought it along with her as a jest, or so she told me. She is quite as tall as Herbert (who is a small man, as you know), besides being robust. The suit would have fitted her nicely. We have all talked over the matter with Captain Sedley."

"So have I. The sentry was unsuspecting, it seems, though Captain Sedley suspected the nature of the trick directly upon being informed of the escape. But when the disguised young woman entered the barracks prison, she carried a large bundle under her arm, which ought to have aroused the suspicions of any one but a numskull, password or no password."

"That doubtless contained a gown and old bonnet of my aunt's, among other things. Such articles are missing from her effects, and, as she is a large woman, Romney must have utilized them in effecting his escape in the pretended young officer's company. At any rate, neither was questioned when they passed out together, the larger figure as a woman."

"Yes; I know that."

"And Naomi was still carrying her bundle, though somewhat shrunken in size, so that she must also have taken away some of her own garments with her. Indeed, auntie says that her best gown and considerable underwear are missing."

"I'll warrant you!"

Jessie clasped her hands afresh, and there were tears that were not wholly of indignation in her eyes.

"Oh, Dick, the scandal and disgrace of it!" she exclaimed. "I feel that, and for my foolish cousin's sake, more than I do the treasonableness of it all."

"I don't wonder that you do!" assented her lover, moodily.

"To run away thus clandestinely with an officer, and a Britisher, at that!"

"Oh, fiddlesticks, my dear Jessie!" cried Dick, bursting into one of his gay laughs at last. "I suppose a Britisher answers the purpose as well as another when a girl is in love, and Romney is a deuced good-looking rascal, if I say it myself."

"But to run away with him!"

"Nonsense! They'll doubtless be able to make their way to New York without much trouble in the present disturbed state of the intervening region, when they can get married in a hurry. The scoundrel has a gentleman's breeding, as they call it, he can hardly help loving such a handsome brunette (he is a Saxon blonde on his own part, as you know) to distraction, apart from this signal act of devotion on her part, and I never heard of his being a married man already. In fact, I believe him to be heart and honor-free in that respect. That is all there is about it."

"You really think so, Dick?"

"I do, indeed."

"Well, perhaps you are right in part. But I have been thinking the matter over, and I don't believe they can have gone directly to New York. The risk would be very great by land just now, and they could not well go by water."

"True; but where else could they have gone for safety?"

"To Collingford Hall."

Dick slapped his thigh, his dark face lighting up.

"Good idea!" he exclaimed. "I must follow it up." And he kissed Jessie heartily for the suggestion.

This colloquy had been held upon the porch. They now returned to the sitting-room, where the elderly women were, and where Dick gave them a running account of his experience at General Washington's headquarters, and in the stirring engagement that ensued.

Mrs. Goldheart was chiefly interested in the figures that her husband, the colonel, and her son, the captain, cut in the narrative.

"I am real glad that my husband was able to assist you in such distinguished society, Captain Dareall," she observed, with lofty condescension;—indeed, this good woman was nothing if not lofty, even under the most distressing circumstances, and she felt the humiliation of her daughter's mad escapade more keenly than she would confess. "John has a heart of gold, as our name indicates, and you would doubtless have made no headway either with General Washington or the young marquis (they do say that he is just lovely) without his kindly intercession. And as for the obscure but worthy person—Flinders, you said, I believe—who was so fortunate as to save my son's life, Herbert shall pay him twenty pounds for the service, if the war is ever over and we should ever get back our own. I," with virtuous emphasis, "shall see to that myself!"

"Oh, Aunt Martha!" murmured Jessie, mortified beyond measure at this contemptible self-sufficiency on the part of her relative, while her mother was no less vexed.

"Thank you, ma'm," replied Dick, dryly. "Your husband, the colonel, is a very great and important personage, no doubt—in *your* estimation. But you are somewhat 'out.' My fame had gone before me, and General Washington and the Marquis de La Fayette (you're right about the marquis being just lovely, too—he's a solid brick of the finest French porcelain, and no mistake!) would have received me just as well as they did if he had not been in existence. And as for you or any one else offering to pay brave Fog-eye Flinders for saving your precious son's life—well, I should pity the one making the proposition, that is all."

And with these parting shots, he rose to take his leave, holding out his hand for Jessie to accompany him to the gate, according to their custom.

"Oh, Dick!" exclaimed the young girl, when they were outside; "I feel so bad. But you won't mind her, will you?"

"Not a bit of it," replied her lover, cheerfully. "The poor old girl couldn't be other than a snob, if she were to try. And I really pity her for the humiliation she must feel over her daughter's conduct."

"Where are you going now?"

"To my mother's first, and then to see the Mist Witch fellows, and to circulate around generally. There is much to do before I can think of bunking time, and yet more to-morrow. A good-night kiss, sweetheart! No danger of your running off with a Britisher—I'll swear to that!" He opened his arms.

"Oh, Dick, my lover, my sailor prince!" murmured the beautiful girl, as she melted into his honest embrace; "you have already the admiration of the great and powerful. You will be something noble, something grand!"

"Ay, ay, Jessie!" with his farewell hug and kiss. "A bold privateersman, my darling!"

And as he went off down the moonlight road, he partly turned to her his handsome, reckless face, while troling forth in his rich voice the old sea-ditty:

"A bold privateer, my girl,

A bold privateer!

Share and share alike as their flag they strike

And the caution smoke-wreaths clear,

With the plunder dead on the capstan-head,

And then home again to my dear!"

While approaching his mother's cottage, Dick heard his name called.

He turned to grasp the hand of a young man who had overtaken him, and for whom he had a strong liking.

This was Jeremiah Wardlow, Squire Collingford's penniless half-brother, but with his home at the Hall, and a jovial, popular fellow, a great favorite with the maidens of the country-side, and as well known for his uncompromising patriotic sentiments as his more consequential kinsman was for his Toryism.

"Friend Dick, I have been wishing greatly to see thee," was this young man's greeting now, with a mock solemnity of speech and manner that he was fond of assuming at times. "Not alone to congratulate thee on this battle-luster and greatness that hath come upon thee, like the thunder-clothing upon the Jobian war-speed's neck, but to tell thee something else that may interest thee nearly."

"Spare me your congratulations, then, Jerry," cried Dick, laughing, "and tell me the something else that may interest me nearly. I haven't a doubt it is well worth the hearing."

"Thee speakest truly," continued the other,

his manner changing. "I am again alone with the servants at the Hall."

"Oho! and the squire?"

"Off in his yacht again."

"Since when?"

"Since two hours after daybreak this morning."

"Ah! alone?"

Jeremiah's eyes twinkled.

"Ah, you rogue, as if you didn't suspect the truth!" he chuckled. "Your escaped lieutenant and the adventurous lady are off to New York with him."

"You are right; I did suspect it."

"But there's more yet for thee, friend Dick."

"What is it?"

"I am a good patriot, and likewise a good listener on occasion, Dick."

"I believe you."

"Romney expects to take command of the great new schooner, the *Cormorant*, whose outfit is now completing. He will be here in the bay for his revenge within a week."

Dick's black eyes kindled greedily.

"You are sure of this, Jerry?"

"I'd swear to it, friend Dick—that is, by deductive reasoning, you understand?"

Dick regarded his companion thoughtfully and without speaking for a moment.

In spite of his being but a half-brother, Jerry bore a striking resemblance to the Tory squire. It was in speech and manner no less than in person, and many was the time he had convulsed his boon companion at the village inn—for Jerry was a ne'er-do-weel and roysterer in a mild way—by taking off some of his dignified relative's peculiarities.

"You are not very fond of Tory Collingford, I understand, Jerry?" queried the young commander, at last, "your own half-brother though he be."

"By my life, I hate him right cordially, as thee ought to know, friend Dick."

"You would assist in defeating his Tory machinations at a pinch?"

"Try me!"

"Give me your hand on it. I shall doubtless have occasion to test your patriotism later."

They clasped hands and separated.

CHAPTER XII.

WANTED, A PRIVATEER.

DURING Dick Dareall's absence at Monmouth, in accordance with instructions he had left behind him, the captured brig had been towed up into a deep, narrow cove, but with a sand-bay lying across its mouth, where repairs could be made on her without any danger of a recapture being attempted.

This cove was also the Mist Witch's favorite anchorage when not in service.

In fact, the whole of Barnegat Bay, by reason of its prevalent shallowness and many bars was a pretty good shelter against war-vessels, though it was now pretty certain that the British would not be long in sending a vessel or vessels in search of reprisal for the capture of the *Hector*.

No further enterprise was, therefore, immediately attempted with the little schooner, every one being content to watch and wait.

This patience was rewarded on the evening of the fourth day, when one of the Witch's crew, posted on lookout at a point half-way down the bay, came into the village with the intelligence that a gunboat was grounded on a sand-bar to the north of the small island known as the Gridiron just inside the inlet between Long Beach and Island Beach.

In the mean time another lookout had been permanently stationed on the ocean side of Island Beach, near its southern extremity, with instructions to light a beacon fire at the first glimpse he should catch of the *Cormorant*, whose coming was anxiously and eagerly expected, notwithstanding that she would doubtless be heavily armed and manned, and with a light enough draught to enable her, with proper pilotage, to proceed up the bay as far as the village of Tom's River itself.

When the news of the grounded gunboat was brought to Dick, he was at a small inn kept by a queer character named Hooks—playfully called Fish-hooks, for short, by his fisher-folk gossips and customers—not far from the cove in which the schooner and the brig were concealed, together with a number of his men, Salty Junk and Fog-eye Flinders among them.

"A gunboat on the Gridiron Shoals!" commented Dick. "Could you read her name, Revels?"

"Not a squint of it, Captain Dick," replied the lookout. "It was too rainy even for the squinting glass I brought to bear on her."

"What sort of a gunboat?"

"Medium-sized, cutter-rigged, and looking as if she might be crowded with men."

"On the shoals pretty tight?"

"Nose on hard, and the tide dropping out."

"Fish-hooks!" called out the young commander, "fill this cider jug again, and if Revels wants anything stronger, let him have it. He looks wet and tired." And then, as the order was being complied with, he looked out of the door, which stood wide open, reflectively.

It had been raining all day, and was still coming down, the night setting in black and dismal.

"Fog-eye," observed Dick, after a pause, "will there be a fog?"

The lanky gunner of the *Mist Witch*, who was reasonably full of hard cider, having been swilling it with commendable industry since breakfast time, made his way rather unsteadily to the tap-room door, and looked out over the broad and darkening surface of the rain-swept bay.

"A heavy one and a shifter," he replied, after a few moments' inspection. "It's coming up the bay now, Cap, though on the ocean side, outside the beaches, it will be light."

A bold beam sprung into the young commander's reckless dark eyes, and he struck the table before him with his strong clinched hand.

"Boys," he cried, "who knows but that the gunboat aground down yonder might answer our turn in lack of something better?"

"For what?" called out more voices than one.

"For what?" he thundered. "Why, for the privateer we are looking and longing for, as a matter of course!"

"But I thought we were to wait for the big new schooner," one of the men ventured to say.

"But she doesn't show up, and I for one am sick of waiting. At all events, we shall capture the gunboat to-night, in order to look her over."

He had risen to his feet, and was striding restlessly over the sanded floor.

"Come, make your preparations, and get the rest of you together. We start in an hour. Salty, you look up those new recruits from down the coast. Fog-eye, you see Captain Sedley, and see if he wouldn't like to come with half his militia company to help land-lubber the brig. We can attend to manning her out of our own crew, and now, since his prisoners have been sent to Philadelphia, he has no binding responsibilities ashore."

All had sprung to their feet, and were briskly astir at the promise of fresh adventure.

"What, Captain Dick!" said Salty Junk, his second in command; "you will take the brig, too?"

"Yes," was the reply; "it will make shorter work. Besides, I have thought of a ruse with respect to her, that may cheapen the affair considerably. Bestir yourselves now, my men! Here, you, Jerry Wardlow," to the bearer of the name, who just then entered the tap-room, and, though very wet outside, was looking very thirsty, "I want you. Never mind if you are dry. Come home to supper with me, and you shall have all the cider you can swallow."

He forthwith carried the ne'er-do-weel of Collingford Hall off with him, and the rest of the company hurriedly dispersed.

"Jerry," said Dick, on the way to his mother's cottage, "there's adventure, with a good chance of loot, afoot. Are you in with it?"

"Every time!" cried Wardlow, who, in spite of his continued thirst, was feeling very happy from a jovial afternoon at the regular village tavern.

And then, remembering his accustomed rôle, he added, with Quaker-like simplicity:

"Thee ought to know, Friend Dick, that I am generally in readiness for any mischievous enterprise, provided it be neither improper nor ungodly."

"A truce to your humbugging!" growled the young commander, impatiently. "This job is to capture a British gunboat aground on the Gridiron Shoals."

"Friend Dick, thee mayst count upon me."

"Good! I was pretty sure I could. The squire came back in his yacht yesterday, did he not?"

"Truly."

"Is he planning with other Tories for the recapture of the brig?"

"Yes."

"Ha! we have not been misinformed by Junk's daughter, who is one of the housemaids at the Hall."

Jerry's eye twinkled roguishly, after its fashion.

"What?" he chuckled; "little Sally Junk a spy in the Tory camp? Oh, if 'Squire Harry could suspect that!"

And he fell into a sort of amused silence, broken by little guffaws.

CHAPTER XIII.

A DASHING ENTERPRISE.

"LOOK you, Jerry," continued Dareall, "what are the particulars of the squire's plot? You ought to know."

"I am not wholly ignorant, friend Dick."

"How many men does he hope to muster from among the Tory families and other discontents?"

"Seventy. In fact, they are mustered already."

"The deuce! where?"

"That I honestly don't know, friend Dick. But I am sure it is nowhere on the Collingford lands."

"I wish we did know. It would be fine to

have Sedley pounce on them at their rendezvous with his militia. The arms in their hands would alone be sufficient to incriminate them in their treason. However, this other way may be the best."

"What other way?"

"You will find out soon enough, my boy. When do they intend to attempt the brig's recapture?"

"To-night at nine."

"Ah! we'll forestall them bravely there. Are they expecting assistance by water, to enable them to hold the brig when captured in accordance with their plot—for of course none of those landmen would know how to take her out of the cove."

"Yes," replied Jerry. "They are expecting two vessels up the bay to-night. And it is their intention to burn Tom's River village after they shall have secured the brig—curse them!"

"There is the right ring to that anathema, Jerry. What vessels are they expecting?"

"The gunboat Jezebel for one."

"A gunboat? Why, that must be the one aground on the Gridiron!"

"I shouldn't wonder at all."

"Good! We'll attend to her. What is the other vessel expected?"

"The big new schooner, *Cormorant*, Lieutenant Romney in command."

Dick gave a joyful exclamation.

"Good Lord!" he cried; "my prayed-for desire! But are you sure Jerry, quite sure?"

"Oh, quite so, friend Dick. I overheard my brother discussing her last night with Major Duvent, the rich Trenton Tory, when I was supposed to be fast asleep in bed, sleeping off the load I got on at the Red Lion."

"But the schooner must be delayed then, for the gunboat to have got into the inlet before her."

"It looks very much like it."

"God grant she fail not to enter the bay some time, and the sooner the better! What is she like, Jerry?"

"My brother saw and examined her the other day in New York. I heard him tell Major Duvent that she is the largest, toughest, hand-somest and fleetest schooner ever turned out by the Massachusetts shipyards. The Britishers captured her off Nantucket three months ago, and have been fitting out and arming her ever since. They say she can fly before or against the wind, like a gull in the teeth of a squall, and dance over the biggest storm-crests like a cork."

The young commander's eye was kindling with a sailor's enthusiasm, his mouth fairly watered, and he was rubbing his hands.

"More, Jerry, more!" he exclaimed, delightedly. "Surely you know yet more about the great schooner than this?"

"A little, friend Dick," replied the Collingford scapegrace, gravely, and affecting to be unconscious of the other's excitement. "She is sea and weather-taut from her main-royal peak to her keel metal, and from stern-post to bowsprit rib. She has new brass chasers, thirty-twos, fore and aft, and broadsides of three twenty-four pounders each, making eight guns in all, without counting a newly-captured French carronade of the latest device, on swivel, amidships."

"She is stuffed with provisions and fixed ammunition for any sort and any length of cruise, with a magnificent after-cabin, and fore-castle quarters for a hundred and twenty-five fighting-men."

"There's not an unsound timber her in sides, a faulty rivet in her planks, or an old or untested rope in her upper works. I rather think, friend Dick," in a mock-diffident and hesitating tone in conclusion, "that she's a fairly good craft."

Dareall threw his arms around him and fairly fell upon his neck.

"Jerry, Jerry!" he cried, in a voice husky with emotion; "you describe me a paragon of the seas. She shall be mine—I already feel my foot upon her quarter-deck, her undulating sea-movement underneath me as that of a gallant steed that knows his rider! But here we are at the gate. Come in, man, come in! My mother will make you welcome, there will be a good supper, and you shall have all the hard cider you can guzzle, if you only remain sober enough to follow my directions implicitly for this one night."

"Many thanks to thee, friend Dick," was the hopeful young man's modest rejoinder, as he followed his companion into the cottage, "but there is no danger on that score. God be praised! I was never yet so exceeding drunk but that I could keep my feet, my speech and my head; though look you, Master Dick, I grant you that matters are occasionally blurred before my eyes."

He was soon at the widow's supper-table, slowly drinking his fill from the great cider-jug, though the maternal welcome which Dick had promised him was more or less forced, could he have but known, this particular young scion of the neighboring aristocracy having never been one of Mistress Dareall's favorites.

But if Jerry was too tipsy, Dick was too overjoyed to notice or think of anything but his prospective possession of the *Cormorant*.

"Mother," he cried, "with the fates only half-way decent, or let them be but fairly neutral, and this night witnesses the foundation of my fortune."

Then he gave her a brief outline of the expedition that was under way.

The good woman, though never free from anxiety on her adventurous son's account, was so accustomed to his dare-devil expeditions as to cease all endeavors to dissuade him from them. And she made no comment now save to piously commend him and his affairs to the keeping of an all-wise and beneficent Providence.

When Dick and his companion returned to the cove nearly all the men for the expedition were in readiness, and both schooner and brig (which had been temporarily repaired) were already being pulled out into the bay by means of sweeps, under the direction of Salty Junk and Fog-eye Flinders respectively.

In addition to the regular crew of the *Mist Witch*, there were twenty hardy fellows from down the coast in the vicinity of Great Bay, Brigantine Beach, Absecom and Great Egg Harbor, all brave, patriotic and eager for adventure—fishermen and reefmen for the most part; while Sedley was also on hand, smiling and confident, with a squad of thirty from his company of militiamen, to fill out the manning of the brig.

"We'll make marines of 'em for the time being," said Dareall, laughing.

To his surprise and gratification, while he was consulting with Sedley, the group was unexpectedly joined by Captain Goldheart, who stepped up to Dick and warmly grasped his hand.

"Sedley has informed me of the nature of your expedition, captain," he observed, "and I would like to go as a volunteer, if you have no objection."

"Objection!" echoed Dick. "God bless you, sir! the more the merrier, and your experience may be of the greatest value to us."

Goldheart, who was a man considerably the young commander's senior, thanked him and then gave his explanation of his presence.

It was simply to the effect that he was on a brief furlough visit to his mother at the Dearborns, when, hearing of the expedition from Sedley, an old schoolmate of his, he had not been able to resist the temptation of joining it on the spot.

But Dick felt that a truer explanation was to be found in the officer's grief and mortification over his young sister's escapade, and possibly a hope of finding her on board the *Cormorant* with Romney, in case of the vessel's capture, and perhaps wreaking a brother's vengeance on the Britisher, while rescuing her from his influence.

It should have been mentioned that Dick had had to content himself with sending his adieux to Jessie by messenger, there being no time for the parting interview that would have been so dear to the hearts of both.

Dareall now instructed his subordinate leaders in the details of his plan of attack, which will be developed in the course of what is to follow.

At eight o'clock, both vessels, with their respective forces aboard, started down the bay before a light wind, the brig in the lead, with Dick himself and Fog-eye Flinders aboard as heads of affairs, the *Mist Witch* following, with Salty Junk in command.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE RAIN AND MIST.

WORKING the brig were ten of the *Mist Witch*'s regular crew, tried and capable men, together with ten of the recruits from down the coast.

In addition to this force, all the militiamen were on board, including Sedley, their commander, and Captain Goldheart, as a distinctive fighting force in case of such an emergency, which, however, in the case of the gunboat was hardly anticipated.

Jerry Wardlow was also with Captain Dick, as a matter of course.

It was a peculiarly fluctuating, but on the whole a dismal and rainy night.

The rain, mist, wind and pitch darkness would possess everything by periodical fits and starts, the intervals being made up of comparative cessations of the storm, with the fog lifting, the rain and wind dying off, and the moon striving to make her opalescent shinnings apparent through the flying scud.

Notwithstanding that most of the expeditionists were familiar with every rod of the great bay from their earliest boyhood, it was at first a question whether this freakish condition would prove an advantage or a detriment to the work in hand.

It turned out on the whole to be an advantage.

Gridiron Island and Shoals were just inside the ocean inlet into the bay, as has been already stated, and twelve miles south of the cove from which the start had been made.

As the spot was neared, at the end of a couple of hours—slow sailing being indispensable by reason of the darkness and the intricacies of the channel, or deeper water-line, between the num-

berless shoals, reefs and submerged rocks with which the long and shallow bay or sound is literally sown—Fog-eye Flinders, who was on the constant lookout at the brig's bow, made a backward and significant gesture to Dick and others who were anxiously awaiting his announcement.

"I see her now," said he, in his low, husky voice.

"How hard aground is she?" demanded Dick. "Bless your toplights, Cap! I can't tell yet," was the reply. "She's fully a mile away. Wait a bit. Ha! they're still hard at work trying to spar her off the shoal. I can hear 'em a yo-heave-yeing."

They could all hear that now upon listening intently, and the anxious interest in the situation momentarily deepened as the brig crept slowly down the black waters with wind and tide.

Suddenly a bright light leaped up to seaward, and Dareall gave a joyful exclamation.

"Jackson's driftwood beacon-fire!" he exclaimed. "It is the signal! He must have sighted the crack war-schooner heading in for the inlet!"

Then ensued an unexpected and gratifying spectacle.

They were sailing in quite close to the "beach," or long, attenuated sandy island-strip forming the eastern boundary of Barnegat Bay, and between it and the ocean beyond, the beach being less than half a mile wide on the average.

At this juncture occurred one of those strangely fluctuating cessations or interruptions of the foul weather that have been mentioned as a characteristic of the night.

The rain ceased, the wind fell, the fog lifted, and even the moon for a moment or two swam out of her hood of storm-scud into a lake patch of liquid blue-black sky, showing the beach-strip, with the breakers thundering and pounding on its outer edge, and the boundless, angry ocean beyond as bright as day.

There was the driftwood-fire flinging its ruddy and yellow radiance aloft and low, far and near.

And there, just beyond, not coming in from the open sea, but scudding along toward the inlet entrance dangerously close in upon the surf-line, was the great schooner itself, beautiful and noble as the ship of a dream, with the fleeting moonlight bright upon her immense snow-white spread of fore-and-aft canvas, wing and wing, and bending and bowing over the billowy swells before the light wind like a wild swan on the bosom of a secluded deep-water mountain lake!

The vision was come and gone in a fleeting moment, but was entrancing during its brief display.

Then—and perhaps very fortunately for the expeditionists—the moon once more shot into her cloudy hood, the rain, the mist and the darkness shut down again, and all was as before.

Every one on both brig and little schooner seemed to be drawing a long breath, and it was only by a warning from the respective leaders that the men were prevented from bursting into a tumultuous cheer.

"A superb vessel, Captain Dareall!" commented Captain Goldheart. "I don't wonder that you are mad to possess her. With such a craft for privateering, an enterprising spirit like you ought to fairly scour the seas. She's an angel!"

"Isn't she?" was Dick's sole response.

Then there came a flash and a boom from seaward, and the driftwood beacon-fire was seen to scatter into a thousand fragmentary sparks that slowly died out one by one.

"Ah!" observed Dick; "she has divined the purpose of Jackson's signal and scattered it to the winds with a round shot. Good! That is better than if she had seen us and guessed our intentions."

The same fleeting gleam of moonlight had revealed the gunboat stuck on the bar, now less than half a mile distant.

The yo-heave-yeing of her men still at work trying to pry her off could now be distinctly heard, and Fog-eye Flinders was still intently observing her from his position at the brig's bow.

"Can you make out her exact situation now?" demanded Dick.

"Yes, sir—er!" replied Fog-eye, straightening himself up at last, with a long breath of relief; "plain as a pikestaff, Cap."

"Is she hard grounded?"

"She'll never come off. The quicksands of the shoal have got a fair clutch on her nose, a ship-of-the-line herself couldn't tow her back, all the sparring and prying in the world can do no good, and the ebbing tide is dropping her deeper and deeper into the death-grasp of the sands. When it's out entirely, she'll be all but swallowed out of sight."

"Then no good would come of her capture?"

"None but to make prisoners of her people, and in that way save their lives, for they can't have any idea of the peril of their situation."

"Good! There's deep water on each side of the spit on which she's stuck, isn't there?"

"Yes, Cap deep and sheer. You could lay

her close aboard on either side without any danger to your own craft whatever."

Dick expressed his satisfaction again, and then, seizing a lantern, ran aft, and signaled the Mist Witch by waving it thrice over his head.

Salty Junk had evidently been anticipating the signal.

Almost instantly a boat was seen to quit the little schooner's side, and pull up in the direction of the stranded gunboat with muffled oars.

"That is all right," said the young commander to himself. "So far, so good."

He was back at the bow just in time to receive a hail from the gunboat.

"What ship is that?" was the hail.

Dick calmly stood up Jerry Wardlow on the spring of the bowsprit, placed a lantern in his hand, and gave him his cue.

"His Majesty's armed brig Hector!" roared Jerry, in response, and in an excellent imitation of his illustrious half-brother's voice. "Isn't that the gunboat Jezebel?"

"It is, it is!" was the joyful reply. "What, have you effected the recapture without our help?"

"It looks like it."

"And is that you, Mr. Collingford?"

"Judge for yourself!" cried Jerry.

He elevated the lantern to his shoulder, so that it brought out his head and face in strong relief against the misty obscurity.

"Hurrah!" shouted the guileless Britisher, who was evidently a personal acquaintance of the real 'squire. "How are you, Mr. Collingford?"

"Fair to middlin'," answered Wardlow, lowering the lantern, and scratching his head. "I wish," he said, in a low voice, "I could call the gentleman by name as handily as he does me, though it isn't my own, but I don't know him at all."

"Never mind that," observed Dick. "You can follow out your instructions without using any name."

"You're grounded, I see," shouted Jerry. "I'm coming alongside with the brig to help you off."

"Good for you!" was the satisfied response. "The Cormorant is also coming in. We shall have it all our own way in giving the entire bay-shore to fire and sword."

CHAPTER XV.

FIRE AND SWORD.

"THE deuce you will!" commented Captain Dick, under his breath. "Perhaps two can play at that charitable game."

There was an interval now of the uncertain misty light, or semi-darkness, wherein everything could be distinguished by outline, but nothing with real distinctness.

And now, as the brig was steered in alongside the grounded gunboat with the utmost caution, for fear of the tongue of quicksand on her own account, the Cormorant could be made out entering the inlet a mile or more to the southeast.

But something else could also be made out. It was the boat from the Mist Witch moving swiftly and silently past the brig, direct for the helpless gunboat's stern, with a bulky something at the feet of the man who sat at the tiller-lines.

Dick rubbed his hands and his eagle eye gleamed.

"Well, well; all well!" he muttered. "Couldn't be better! But, we must dispose of the gunboat before the big schooner can guess our true character."

Then, at his prompting, the impersonator of the Tory 'squire once more called out, saying:

"We'll lay you aboard in another minute, gunboat Jezebel, ahoy!"

"All right!" came the cheery response. "Perhaps you'll enable us to pull off from this cursed shoal. Come ahead!"

"What's your armament?"

"Why, you ought to know, 'squire!"

"I've forgotten, being less of a sailor than yourself."

"Two twenty-fours, with a bow-swivel."

"Are you well-manned?"

"One hundred men, though fully a third of them are pressed Americans, not much to be relied on. But I can't exactly understand, 'squire."

It was evident that the Britisher was growing dangerously puzzled, but the culmination of the plot was now at hand.

As the brig approached the gunboat on the port side, she suddenly flung out her stern as far as possible, while the schooner's boat made something—a keg of powder, with a lighted fuse attached, in fact—fast to the other's rudder-lines, and then noiselessly pulled away again, without detection.

"Why don't you come in, if you intend to, 'Squire Collingford?" shouted the gunboat commander, with a show of temper. "Are you going to spend the whole night talking, or—"

He was cut short by the explosion of the primitive torpedo.

There was a hideous, flaring blaze, a shock, a roar, and the doomed gunboat, with half her stern torn off, was driven yet further and more helplessly into the bosom of the fatal sands.

Dareall's plot was so far an immense success.

While the shock of the explosion was yet quiveringly felt, and the wildest confusion naturally enough prevailed on the stranded vessel, the brig slid into the deep-water trough at the edge of the quick-sand spit, grappled her, and the next instant the American adventurers, with Dareall, sword in hand, at their head, poured over, a torrent of glittering and threatening steel, upon her devoted decks.

In accordance with previous instructions, not a shot was fired, nor was there a single hurrahing shout, lest the oncoming Cormorant should take the alarm.

It was a tumultuous and overwhelming, but silent rush.

Almost simultaneously, the Mist Witch, with her deck-throng of impatient fighters, came slipping up and swung in on the starboard side.

But there was little need. The gunboat was already won. Her crew, taken completely by surprise, made no resistance to that first torrent-like boarding rush. Her commander, a British second lieutenant named Dawson, perceiving too late the clever trap of which he was the victim, surrendered at discretion and without unnecessary delay.

"Sir," said he, in yielding up his sword to Dareall, which the latter at once requested him to retain, "it was a shrewd trick and a daring one. But, hopelessly grounded as I now perceive my ship to be, had I suspected that you were Dick Dareall, the pirate of Barnegat, I would have fought you while a breath or a drop of blood remained in my body."

"I believe you," replied the young commander, dispassionately. "But you wrong me greatly and speak out of your prejudice, sir, when you stigmatize me as a pirate. I am not now, and have never been, anything of the sort, but am a simple and humble server of my country's cause in my own way. However, Captain Dawson, it is as well that you have surrendered at discretion. The quicksands of the Gridiron have got your vessel in their clutch, and by dawn of to-morrow she will be buried out of sight—if we do not make a bonfire of her in the mean time, which is very probable."

"It is true, captain," interposed Jerry Wardlow, with his most owlish expression, and now in a grave, nasal voice that was all his own. "Thee hast corroboration of this strange truth from the representative of my worthy but Tory half-brother, 'Squire Henry Collingford, on this important occasion."

The defeated commander looked at him furiously, without vouchsafing a reply.

The disposition of the grounded but perhaps still somewhat valuable prize was now expedited in the utmost haste, for in the interval of uncertain half-light that was prevailing between the pauses of the misty rain-storm, the Cormorant was dimly descried to have already entered the inlet, less than a mile away, and to be on her first tack up the bay in the direction of the Gridiron.

A crew was left in charge, not only to look after the prisoners, but with directions to collect on deck everything valuable in the shape of provisions, arms, munitions, stores, instruments, and the like, for carrying away at a more convenient opportunity, and to be ready to give the slowly-settling craft to the flames at a preconcerted signal.

All the boats belonging to both the schooner and the brig were also left with the wreck, to facilitate the furtherance of these instructions, in case neither the one nor the other could get back from the prospective fight with the Cormorant in time to assist the abandonment on a more extensive scale.

These arrangements having been perfected in a marvelously short space of time, both vessels swung out from the spit, and headed down the bay to intercept the great schooner, the Hector, as before, in the lead.

The rain and the mist had shut down again, but Fog-eye was enabled to distinguish the enemy's position and movements from time to time.

"She's been well piloted anyway, Cap," was one of his first announcements. "There ain't a shoal or a rock but what she's skimmin' clear of in them long tacks she's making. I wonder who can be at her helmsman's side. There ain't nobody along Barnegat that would pilot a Britisher up the bay, unless it might be a Tory, and such a skunk wouldn't know how."

Dareall returned but an evasive answer, and then looked at Captain Goldheart commiseratingly.

"Captain, it must be your sister," he said, taking him apart. "Both she and Jessie ought to know the bay by heart from their boating experiences in the past. She must be on board yonder, with Lieutenant Romney."

A deeply-pained look crossed Herbert Goldheart's face, and he merely nodded, without answering.

The next fleeting interval of moony brightness corroborated the young commander's suggestion.

It showed the great schooner, her deck crowded with men. Slightly apart from a group of officers on the poop deck, stood Romney's tall form,

and at his side was a graceful feminine figure, the soft drapery of whose skirts was fluttering in the rain-laden wind.

CHAPTER XVI. A BRAVE SEA-FIGHT.

THAT revealing brightness was of but a moment's duration, though it was quite evident that the storm was steadily abating, so far as the rain and the fog were concerned, with a promise of a windy but a clearing change presently.

The schooner had been observed to be on her starboard tack, and less than a quarter of a mile away.

Indeed, ten minutes later, as the brig closed in athwart her course, there came the initial hail from her quarter-deck.

"Ship ahoy!" was trumpeted in Lieutenant Romney's voice.

As in the former case, Jerry Wardlow was again put forward as his half-brother's proxy.

"Ship ahoy!" he roared, in response.

"What ship is that?"

"Is that you, Romney? and don't you know your old brig the Hector?"

The answer was preceded by an exclamation, evidently of gratification and surprise.

Then came the words, roared with true British heartiness:

"Heave to, Collingford, and I'll run alongside. Good Lord! I didn't dream of your recapturing the brig without me."

This was done, Wardlow again holding a lantern to his shoulder for an instant so as to show his head and face.

"Oh!" he called back, as the great schooner was slackening sail and curving in from her long tack, while the brig was slowly coming to a standstill; "you don't know what we chaps can do when we try real hard."

"What was that explosion up the bay yonder?" was the Britisher's rejoinder.

"The Jezebel is on the quicksands, and was trying to help herself off with a torpedo."

"The deuce! aground, eh?"

"Yes."

"Isn't there a smaller craft in your wake?"

"Yes; a fishing-smack also loaded with Loyalists. There were too many of us for the brig, and we were all bound to greet you in bang-up style."

"Capital! and won't we make the Rebels alongshore smoke? What has become of Dareall and his Mist Witch?"

"The Lord knows, and he won't tell."

"Ha, ha, ha! Good enough! Stand by for the grapnels."

"All ready."

There was a clash of the falling irons in the dimness.

And then—the fickle moon suddenly flooded the scene with her unshrouded effulgence.

Sedley had already ranged his militiamen amidships, while the rest of the brig's people, cutlass, hatchet or boarding-pike in readiness, were eagerly awaiting their opportunity like bloodhounds in the leash.

Instantly the militia captain gave the word, and a splendidly-directed volley of musketry swept athwart the schooner's crowded deck amidships.

"Boarders to the front!" yelled Dareall, springing forward, sword in hand. "For free America and Independence!"

And again, as in the case of the gunboat, the hardy coastmen and fishermen, followed by the militiamen with fixed bayonets, poured over the intervening rails upon the astounded ship's company of the Cormorant, though in this case the boarding charge was accompanied by shots and yells.

Romney, after the first shock of surprise, had drawn his sword, and rushed to the encouragement of his panic-stricken crew.

His subordinate officers were not less equal to the emergency, while the light-robed graceful figure at the taffrail—apparently forgotten in the tremendous excitement of the moment—had seated herself on the guard, with a look of supreme terror on her whitening face, as if to remove herself as far as possible from the pandemonium so suddenly let loose upon the decks.

Though the British tars had given way at first before that fierce headlong charge which dropped many a stout fellow dead or dying out of their confused mass, they were still nearly three to one, and readily responded to the reorganizing encouragement on the part of their officers.

In less than a minute after their recoil, they rallied. The contest was then hand-to-hand, and slowly, inch by inch, foot by foot, they began to recover their lost ground, forcing the assailants backward upon the bulwark line.

"Upon them, Englishmen!" shouted Romney, fighting valiantly. "Hurl the accursed rebel tricksters back, and then burn their deck under their fallen bodies!"

Dareall strove to reach him, as Captain Goldheart already had striven, but, like the latter, he was prevented by the intercepting surge of the miscellaneous battle for the mastery.

"Hold your ground, patriots!" he cried. "Help is at hand, and the peerless schooner shall yet be ours!"

As the moon was disappearing again, he at this juncture jumped back on the rail, and touched off a rocket with which he had provided himself as a signal to the men in charge of the stranded gunboat.

As he did so, and with the Americans still making a desperate stand at the line of the grappled bulwarks, a shout of exultation burst from his lips.

The Mist Witch—so low in the water and unobtrusive in her manners as to have scarcely attracted the attention of the Britisher at all—was swinging in noiselessly to make fast on the port side.

There was a jarring bump, the rattling crash of the out-thrown grapnels, and then the little schooner's band of trained fighters, with Salty Junk at their head, were swarming up over the high rail and hurling themselves unexpectedly on the astounded enemy's backs.

This caused Dick to rally the primary assault in his turn, the militiamen had been enabled to reload and now poured in another effective volley, and the original boarders again assumed the aggressive.

Though still the superior force in point of numbers, the British, finding themselves thus beset on both sides, and doubtless magnifying the numbers of their fresh assailants, were at once bewildered and then panic-stricken.

They at first wavered, and then broke, though their officers still managed to rally them in a serried stand about the companionway, with their backs to the overhang of the poop-deck, leaving the entire deck forward and midships in the hands of the Americans.

The moon having disappeared, darkness was once more holding sway.

But at this juncture a lurid blaze flashed up from the stranded Jezebel, less than a mile distant.

A terrific explosion followed, and a moment later the gunboat was enveloped in flames, which once more lighted up the scene of carnage on the Cormorant's long deck.

The Americans had not paused on account of the darkness, but had continued their attack on the Britishers in their new position with redoubled fury.

The contest was still doubtful, when Dareall made another determined effort to cross swords with Romney.

He was again foiled by an intercepting wave of the general fight, and had just recovered himself after a long slip in a pool of blood, when he felt a pistol clapped to the side of his head.

"You're too brave a fellow to be killed like a dog, Dick Dareall!" called out a stern voice that he remembered. "But you must yield yourself my prisoner, or I shall have to blow out your brains!"

Dick had just recognized Midshipman Harker in the speaker and the grasper of the pistol threatening him, when the young Britisher himself fell dead, half beheaded by a tremendous cutlass-stroke at the hands of Fog-eye Flinders, who with another lightning-like stroke relieved his young commander of yet another British officer who was in the act of leveling a pistol at his head.

Then—his entire lanky figure transfigured into heroic proportions by the fierce joy of battle—Fog-eye plunged without pause into the general combat, silent and terrible, his ordinarily lack-luster eyes blazing with a wild fire, his sword-arm bared to the shoulder, his cutlass dripping with gore from point to hilt.

As Dareall paused to breathe himself on the outskirts of the fray (which was thus far progressing rather favorably for the Americans), he became aware of Mistress Goldheart.

She was still crouching, as if half appalled, on the taffrail far back of the poop, but her eyes, instead of following Romney through the fight, as might have been expected, were fastened upon the bare-armed and transfigured Flinders, as if fascinated.

Before Dick could turn over this odd circumstance in his mind, he noticed that Captain Goldheart and Lieutenant Romney were at last joined in personal combat, and he once more dashed into the thickest of the fray, shouldering and striking right and left, in a mad effort to reach them.

He was just in time, reaching the spot at a moment when Goldheart tumbled to his knees, by reason of a wounded wretch clutching at his feet in the death-agony.

Exultant and infuriated beyond measure, the Britisher's sword was poised for a death-thrust into the bosom of his unfortunate opponent, when with a flash Dareall's weapon turned it to one side.

The next instant the two were matched, their bright blades playing against one another in passes of incredible fury and swiftness.

"Curse you, Dick Dareall! must you forever cross my path?" hissed the fighting lieutenant between his teeth. "I had you nearly hanged once—I may complete the task yet!"

"Do not imagine that I have forgotten your politeness, my beauty!" sneered Dareall, more composedly. "And I broke your sword once, and threw it into the sea. It was a crowning

insult that perhaps you would like to wipe out now."

Romney gave a hoarse roar of rage at the recollection, and then they closed at short-arm, stabbing, fighting, like a pair of matched gladiators, but still so evenly pitted as to effect no wound on either side.

As they burst apart to breathe there was a last series of lightning-like passes and parries—Dareall's wrist was the stronger—and the Englishman's sword went flying out of his hand, far over the flame-lit heads of the massed combatants, and thence into the sea.

Dick magnanimously disdained to take advantage of his disarmed foe, and at this juncture by a happy maneuver the battle was suddenly ended.

Junk, assisted by Flinders, led an unsuspected attack on the Britisher's rear from back over the poop, there was a simultaneous bayonet-charge from the front by Sedley with the remnant of his militiamen, and the great schooner was booked for an American privateer.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN EARLY CELEBRATION OF THE GLORIOUS FOURTH.

A FEW minutes later the surrender of the Cormorant was formally made.

A singular incident followed.

By some strange fatality Naomi Goldheart, while an observant watcher of the desperate struggle for the schooner's deck, in spite of the terror it had caused her, had failed to remark her brother's participation therein.

Now, directly after the surrender, when the main deck was still in the utmost confusion following upon the recent carnage, but while the quarter-deck was comparatively deserted, he abruptly approached her where she still crouched pale and shivering on the taffrail and held out his hand, the lurid light from the burning gunboat falling upon his pained, mortified face with a weird, eerie flickering.

Naomi had always regarded this only and elder brother of hers with more respect than love, and not a little awe.

She sprung to her feet with a stifled scream of—

"Don't come to me, Herbert—don't kill me with your accusing face!"

Then retreating rapidly backward, with her hands stretched beseechingly before her as if to keep him off, she toppled over the low guard with a wild cry into the sea.

There was an instant rush to the rail on the part of the officers who had been assembled on the poop-deck, including Romney himself, but in the excitement of the moment nobody thought of plunging after her, or of devising other means for effecting a rescue.

While the hesitation lasted there was a headlong, shouldering rush through the group, the curving dive of a powerful but ungainly form, a splash, and Fog-eye Flinders was overboard to the rescue.

Almost in less time than it takes to tell it—a timely rope having been thrown to him by Dick, who was a last comer upon the scene—he had the young lady on deck again, but little the worse for her mishap, and had placed her in the charge of a negro maid whom she had brought with her from New York.

A few moments later, when Miss Naomi had been taken below, Lieutenant Romney, who was naturally very much subdued since the surrender, approached Captain Goldheart with profound respectfulness in his manner.

"Sir," he said, with quiet dignity, "you are evidently laboring under some painful misapprehension with regard to my connection with your sister—the one woman in the world that I love and respect above all others—that I would like to remove."

As he paused, Goldheart signed him to continue.

"Sir," resumed the Englishman, "in addition to what I owe to the young lady's devotion in assisting me to escape from prison, I am beholden to her for every sentiment that can exalt, ennoble, purify and—"

"Have you married her?" interrupted Goldheart, hoarsely.

"I have not, simply and solely because the young lady would not consent to the ceremony without her mother's presence and sanction. When we went to New York in—in a certain gentleman's yacht, Miss Goldheart had the entire cabin to herself, together with one of the gentleman's female domestics to wait upon her. Immediately on reaching New York, she went to the house and protection of a family friend. She only consented to accompany me on this vessel, on the understanding that we were to be married at Tom's River, with her mother's consent. If that should be persistently withheld, the engagement was to be at an end."

This was certainly not a bad showing for the Englishman on the first face of it.

Captain Goldheart's manner had perceptibly softened, but, after a moment's reflection, he said, with renewed sternness:

"So you were to be married to Naomi in Tom's River, you say, provided her mother's approval could have been obtained?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was the ceremony to be performed before or after you had burned the town and laid waste the adjacent bay-shore and country-side, as was inadvertently confessed by Captain Dawson, of the Jezebel, your associate commander in this expedition, which has ended so disastrously for you and so happily for us?"

Lieutenant Romney started violently, flushing to the roots of his hair, after which he hung his head, avoiding the stern looks of his questioner and such bystanders as were present.

"My honorable intentions, sir, with regard to Miss Goldheart," he muttered, half-inarticulately, "were substantially as I have stated. The young lady herself will doubtless corroborate them, if necessary."

And with that he strode away, a doubly-shamed and humiliated man.

The schooner had been won, but at a grievous cost. The loss to the adventurers was eleven killed and eighteen wounded, while that of the enemy was more than twice as great. But, as an offset, the Americans had secured a magnificent war-vessel, thoroughly appointed and equipped for a long cruise, together with ninety-six prisoners, rank and file, which, including the one hundred secured by the capture of the gunboat, made up a superb success.

The remainder of the night was spent in fitting and cleaning up, besides taking care of the wounded, the heavens having cleared, with a stiff, freshening wind from the northwest.

It was daylight before the three vessels, captors and captive, started up the bay, and then they were presently surrounded by the boats and a large hastily-constructed raft, all laden with adventurers, prisoners and spoils from the destroyed Jezebel, not a blackened fragment of which was now to be seen above the treacherous quicksand spit of the Gridiron Shoals.

Provisions were passed over to the temporary castaways, cheers rent the air, and the best of exultant good humor was the order of the occasion.

Then a sudden happy thought occurred to Dick Dareall, as the head and front of the victorious scene.

After consulting with Junk, Flinders and others, and leaving certain orders with them, he mounted the spring of the bowsprit on the brig, as being the highest hull-point available, and commanded the attention of the floating crews with a significant gesture.

"Friends and fellow-patriots!" he shouted, in his stentorian voice; "this is a great victory we are jubilating over. But has it occurred to you what day this is, and what tremendous political event it commemorates, and is destined to commemorate with increasing zeal, significance and earnestness through all future time?"

There was a puzzled silence, unbroken by a single attempt to frame an answer to the question; for the country was but in its iron cradle, even the Constitution was unborn, and men of the commoner sort appreciated but vaguely the importance of the historical events they were daily contributing to pile up so fast one upon another.

"It is the Fourth of July!" thundered out the young commander; "and two years ago the Declaration of Independence was signed and given to the world. Fellow-freemen, I have not heard of this glorious, this momentous event being formally celebrated before. Let us celebrate it and our victory together now with a salvo that shall go ringing down the ages, when the day shall be sacredly memorable and glorious to millions yet unborn, as commemorating the first dauntless, blood-sealed title deed to freedom and self-government, not only for America, but for the entire human race, where-soever wounded and stricken Liberty writhes up to strike at the oppressor's heel that would grind and crush her into the dust!"

They understood, or half-understood, him now, and a tremendous cheer was the reward of his passionate appeal.

Then he waved his hand again. Guns and gunners were in readiness, and a tremendous salute was simultaneously thundered forth by every piece of ordnance on the three vessels.

"Shiver my timbers and split my royals," cried Fog-eye Flinders, with a return of his nasal drawl and lanky, shuffling manner, as if his battle-transfiguration of a few hours before had never been, "eff there ain't a meaning in that 'ere saloot that you don't git at every bumin' of gunpowder fur war or fun! Independence Day is a big day fur Hoz-kiah Flinders hereafter, whatever it may be to other chaps."

Then he paused, with a puzzled trouble in his course face and strange eyes.

He had been standing by the companionway of the Cormorant while giving utterance to this homely but praiseworthy sentiment, and was suddenly aware of his being gravely, fixedly regarded by a pair of very dark and very beautiful eyes in a head that had just then appeared in view from below.

They were the eyes of Naomi Goldheart.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CHRISTENING.

SEVERAL days after the stirring successes on Barnegat Bay, Dick Dareall called upon his sweetheart, Jessie Dearborn, in a spick-and-

span new dark-blue uniform and chapeau, tastefully trimmed and faced with red, bound round with heavy gold cord, that set off his magnificent figure to splendid advantage.

Jessie had never seen him looking so finely before, and she clapped her hands with delight.

"Oh, Dick!" she exclaimed, running into his arms with even more than her accustomed joy, "you look like—like—like an admiral!"

"Do I, indeed?" said the young man, kissing her, and highly pleased, for he was not without a certain pardonable vanity as to appearances.

"Well, now, Jessie, who knows but that I may be one some day? At all events, I hope to capture one or two of that breed of quarter-deck strutters before I die, when I might naturally enough step into their shoes, you know."

"But how did you manage it, Dick?"

"Manage what?"

"This splendid uniform, and so becoming, too."

"My dear, that is my secret."

"Which you will tell to me."

"Of course."

"Tell it, then."

"This uniform, without the facings and trimmings, my dear, is from the cabin stores of the Cormorant. My mother, who is a capital seamstress, as you know, managed the rest for me, and the suit in its original shape chanced to fit me to perfection." He glanced down complacently over his well-fitting breeches, his heavy black silk stockings, which his big calves filled out so tautly, and his broad-toed, serviceable morocco shoes with their broad silver buckles, finishing by flicking off a stray shred from his wide sleeve with its elaborately frogged cuff. "And the best of it is, Jessie, that there's more where this came from—more than enough to keep myself, Salty Junk and Fog-eye Flinders in bang-up privateering uniforms for years; though, of course, you know, we shall only cut this sort of a ground-swell on gala or state occasions."

"But why should Sam Junk and Hez Flinders wear anything so beautiful?" cried Jessie, withdrawing herself a bit from her lover to admire him afresh.

"They are my second and third in command, my dear," was the reply. "Therefore, this sumptuous toggery, or something like it, will be in keeping with their positions."

"And make them look like sea-savages in livery. However," again cuddling close to him, and patting him on the broad lapel of his new coat, "they would only serve to show you off to braver advantage, my glorious Dick."

"But a truce to all this nonsense, Jessie!" and the young commander assumed a more serious expression. "To-day, as you ought to know, I set out in the great schooner, to carry our numerous prisoners to Philadelphia, where I also trust to obtain my letter-of-marque commission without delay."

"Yes, I know."

"And before I go, she must be rechristened; and it is you who are to christen her anew, as already agreed on."

"Yes, Dick," her pretty blonde face was growing thoughtful, "but really I think the old Mist Witch the best name of all."

"Scarcely appropriate, my dear, though I confess to being at sea myself in the matter. But it was to be left entirely to you."

"And couldn't the name be transferred from the little schooner, in which you have won your preliminary fame, to the big one, which may hold a yet greater in store for you, Dick?"

"Oh, yes; no difficulty about that. But fogs and mists are not of constant occurrence, you know, and the wide ocean is henceforth to be our field."

"True, true!" her face suddenly brightened.

"Well, I think I have it."

"What have you hit on, Jessie?"

"It isn't fair of you to know until I break the bottle over the great craft's nose, and call out the name for everybody to hear."

"All right, then! It will be only an hour to wait. So get yourself in readiness, my darling. It will be something of a ceremony, and doubtless all the town and countryside will be present to witness it. Yet wait!" as she was starting away from his side.

"What is it?"

"How is Mistress Naomi bearing herself?"

"Better than could be expected. She is getting over her sense of humiliation apparently, and will soon be her old self again."

"Not pining over Romney's new misfortune, eh?"

"No; and it is strange, too. She doesn't seem to be thinking or caring for him nearly as much as one would expect."

"Ah, I think I could guess an explanation of that! Doubtless another and a better man dawning in her fervid imagination."

"Perhaps it is, but I can't imagine whom."

"Well, her heart is in the right place at last, I fancy, and she will be happy in the end. Captain Goldheart has rejoined the army, I suppose?"

"Yes; he quitted us last night. But there is another news item, and perhaps a good one, for you, Dick."

"Let me have it, then."

"Squire Collingford rode past on his bay hunter an hour ago, and, though I was on the porch he did not even turn his eyes toward the house."

"The Tory villain!" Dick's brow darkened; "Well enough for him to keep quiet and dark. And it was a lucky chance for him and his plotting discontents that they did not assemble at the cove on that eventful night. Sedley's lieutenant was on the watch for them, and there would have been more than one hanging, had they been pounced upon while with arms in their hands. However, let be, let be! Their ropes and nooses will be of their own weaving yet."

"Jerry goes with you, I hear?"

"Yes, as boatswain. He's more than half a sailor already, and I look for something good out of the happy-go-lucky rascal, whose family complications may thus far have kept him down beneath his merit. But I hear the folks waxing impatient at the dock, Jessie."

When Jessie Dearborn stood at the bow of the great schooner an hour later, it was to overlook a smiling and grateful scene.

The superb vessel was dressed out in all the bunting that had been scraped together from far and near.

The captured war-brig, that was to accompany her, under Fog-eye's command, with part of the prisoners, was tricked out only a little less gayly. And the little Mist Witch, which was to stay behind with a meager crew of old fishermen and others for the defense of the port, was hovering near, like a white gull in the wake of a pair of stately albatrosses, with her one great flag, that she had already made so glorious, fluttering bravely from her gaff.

A great and expectant crowd were gathered along the water-front, and Sedley with his militiamen was there, their one rusty old field-piece in their midst ready for firing.

Jessie stretched forth her white hand at last, and a silence fell upon the murmuring multitude—multitude for that place and time.

"Brave ship!" she apostrophized, calling out the words in a clear, musical voice that could be distinctly heard by all in the soft stillness of the bright July morning; "be thou also a Witch of the waves, after the manner of thy lesser namesake, but upon a grander and nobler field—a sorceress of success for our country's flag, of confusion, terror and dismay for our country's foes!"

Then, with a graceful, true cast, she broke the bottle of rum that had been handed her over the bows, calling out yet more loudly:

"SEA WITCH I name thee now and evermore! and may the God of battles and of tempests fondle thee in thy career and keep thee in thy hour of need!"

The brief ceremony was complete.

The rusty cannon of the militiamen roared out its salute as if it would burst. Broadsides answered it from the vessels. Men shouted and yelled, women waved their kerchiefs, urchins danced and screamed.

Then, Jessie having been put ashore with her lover's farewell kiss upon her lips, the great schooner, followed by the brig, spread her mighty white wings to the light but favoring northwest wind, and slipped off down the bay as gracefully as a dream, with a red, white and blue pennant of immense length streaming from her main peak, and the flag of the new and struggling nation rolling and unrolling its bright folds from her gaff.

There was, perhaps, but one person witnessing the stirring scene who was not thrilled thereby with patriotic enthusiasm and pride.

This was Squire Collingford, who was a gloomy spectator of it all from an upper casement of this stately hall, a mile or two back on its shrubberied hill.

His face darkened, and he shook his fist after the retreating form of the re-christened daughter of the waves.

"Dick Dareall, beware!" he muttered, between his set teeth. "You are on top of the wave now. But, as he laughs best who laughs last, so every wave has its trough no less than its crest. And there is that mischief plotting and preparing, with Loyalist vengeance at its bottom, which may yet rend your proud heart when it is at its highest, most exultant leap!"

CHAPTER XIX.

COMMISSIONED.

DICK DAREALL reached Philadelphia with his prizes and his prisoners without detention or mishap, to find that his fame and that of his brave men had gone everywhere before him.

His reputation had already become national.

The city, just beginning to breathe freely again after being relieved from the British occupation, was ready to grasp him by the hand; invitations and proffered hospitalities were showered upon him from every quarter; the renown of his achievements was spread far and wide, and not a few of the army officers were already bitterly jealous of a fame so suddenly and brilliantly snatched by so young and comparatively uncultured a man.

But Dareall, only eager for fresh action and usefulness, cared little or nothing for all this.

His vanity, if such it were, was but the transient veneering of his growing and nobler nature; and if he had tasted of quarter-deck dominion to find it sweet and delicious, he was daily and hourly growing to think less of self and more of country, less of individual ambition and more of the great cause to which he was native, and in which it was his desire to serve rather with honor than distinction.

The Congress chancing to be in extra session, he had no difficulty in obtaining his commission on the spot, and with little or none of the legislative red tape usually attendant upon such demands.

In fact, he would now have no difficulty in obtaining it even without Washington's recommendation, though this lent dignity and character to his request.

It was on the morning of the twenty-fifth of July, 1778, that Dick Dareall slipped down the Delaware on the brief initial cruise in which he proposed to test his abilities as a commander, the qualities of his privateer and the discipline of his ship's company.

The latter consisted of the Sea Witch's full complement of one hundred and twenty-five men, the majority of them his personal friends and fellow-coastmen, who had already been tried and tested to the full.

The remainder were miscellaneous adventurers and fighting-men, most of them able seamen and all with more or less sea-faring experience, of various nationalities, eager for prize-money, and promising well in the main.

It should have been mentioned that before quitting Philadelphia, the Hector, with the consent of the authorities, had been profitably disposed of to the agent of the French Government, so that Captain Dareall had had the moiety of a large sum in gold (the remainder going to the Congress toward the conduct of the war) to divide among the original ship's company of the Mist Witch, which had made the capture.

Thus, the majority of the privateer's crew were already in high good humor—prize-money already in pocket, with an insatiable craving for more; while the fact that Vice-Admiral Charles Hector, Comte d'Estaing, was hourly expected off the coast, with the first French fleet in aid of the American cause, was sufficient to inspire a general feeling of satisfaction and confidence throughout the vessel.

It was glorious weather, with just enough wind from the northwest to facilitate the down-river passage.

Delaware Bay was entered by noon, the wind meanwhile freshening merrily, and proving the Sea Witch no less a flyer with the springing white-caps bursting under her prow than a free skimmer under a softer and more genial air that would have had little or no effect upon a heavier and square-rigged craft.

A thorough examination had proved her to be stored, provisioned and equipped with exceptional thoroughness.

The only alterations that had been found necessary to make upon her while lying at Philadelphia had been with respect to a change in her name and figurehead.

SEA WITCH now appeared in broad gilt letters on her stern. For the original figurehead—the representation of an enormous, ungainly, voracious-looking bird, in stooping attitude and with wings partly outstretched, like a sick buzzard, with a nondescript snake in its beak—there had been substituted an appropriate classical image that Dick had fortunately come upon in an old ship-chandlery store in South street, which, with certain additions and alterations at the hands of a competent wooden image carver had suited his purpose admirably.

As now affixed to the prow and projecting far out under the bowsprit, with the spray of the cutwater showering it bravely when the white-caps leaped and curled, it was a prominent and ornamental feature of the graceful hull.

The image of a nereid, or sea-nymph, of titanic but symmetrical proportions, a smile on the red lips and in the blue eyes, a torrent of golden hair streaming back in the wind, with one hand clutching the American ensign to her virgin breast, the other far outstretched, and yet slightly curved as if in the act of hurling at a foeman's heart the zigzag golden lightning-bolt in its nervous grasp!

And, added to all this, American-built, quite new, a peerless sailer, and sound from stem to stern, from keel to peak!

An American ship, with an American crew (in the main), with the American flag at her gaff, a dauntless American sailor in command, and the world of waters before her where to choose!

Never before, it is safe to say, at least on an initial cruise, had a letter-of-marque privateer set out from any port under gallanter auspices or with a braver promise of career.

A large ship, evidently a big British blockader, and probably a double-decker, was evaded with consummate ease in the vicinity of Brandywine Shoal, which possessed no light-house then as now.

Cape Henlopen was passed by sunset, with not a sail in sight, and then, headed due east, with the wind still freshening, it was hey for blue water and the untrammelled sea!

By midnight, with the moon brilliant in the star-studded blue-black of heavens clear as a bell and deep as a dream, a sail was reported on the port bow.

"It's a Britisher!" announced Fog-eye Flinders, the officer of the watch, after an hour's close overhauling. "I am dead sure of it, Cap—most likely a transport, too, but in ballast!"

CHAPTER XX.

BLUE WATER.

"A TRANSPORT, even if empty, is good enough to start with," observed the young commander, cheerfully. "Mr. Flinders, I think we can let out our fore-topgallant without strain, and while you are about it you might as well loosen out the flying jib."

The order was given, and, under this fresh pressure, the gallant Sea Witch, which had already been carrying a vast stretch of fore and aft canvas, with the gale on her port quarter, leaned over on her side, and fairly flew over the short, chopping waves in quest of her prey.

With his hands in his pockets and his head in the air, Dick Dareall paced his quarter-deck with a feeling of exultation and pride he had often dreamed of, but had never realized before.

Indeed, he was at times not exactly certain of fully realizing it now.

"She runs like an angel!" he exclaimed. "By Jupiter! just note her style, Flinders. She seems to fairly feather the crests, with the between-troughs untouched, like the arch beneath a Spanish lady's instep!"

"I'm a-remarkin' of her, sir," replied the second mate, prosaically, but doubtless imagining that he also was poetic in his assent. "She's a son of a gun, and no mistake—dock my grog off she ain't!"

"How far off do you make the transport now?"

"Four mile an' a half."

"Well, she's a lumbering tub. At this rate we ought to send a round shot across her bows in less than an hour."

And this was accordingly effected.

The fugitive was a small but full-rigged ship. She had not hesitated to fly the British Jack, even after taking the alarm and crowding on every stitch of canvas, including her royals and skysails in the attempt to outfoot her pursuer.

But as well might a cart-horse undertake to outfoot a thoroughbred.

At the end of an hour's chase the Witch was but a mile behind, and overhauling her like the wind.

"Try a reminder with our bow-chaser, Fog-eye," suggested Dick, forgetting in his excitement the ceremoniousness which he was about half-resolved to introduce in his relations with his officers and crew. "Or don't you think it time yet?"

"Just the time to a minute," was the response.

The man who had been selected as chief gunner—an old Canadian man-of-war's-man, of long experience in the French navy, named Barbareau (dubbed the "Barber" for short), and an eccentric character in his way—was summoned aft and given his instructions.

"Ze gun of brass is a good gun," he said, with the elaborate bow that was habitual with him when there was time for it, "and ze ball of iron is a good ball. Messieurs, my compliments!"

It was impossible to send the conventional shot across the fugitive's bows, for she was dead ahead, and sheeting away for all she was worth.

But the chaser was let go by the polite Monsieur Barbareau with such precision that the ball passed completely through her lower rigging, fore and aft, without cutting a rope, or doing anything more than boring a round hole through her mainsail.

"Good!" observed Dick, with a chuckle; "that ought to communicate our intentions, at all events."

But, to the surprise of everybody, the ship suddenly hove to, and began barking back with a couple of insignificant twelve-pounders from her port broadside.

"What can the blasted jackass mean?" cried Dick, laughing. "Does he imagine we care for such toy popguns as those?"

"Looks as though that skipper was aching to have his ship sunk," suggested First Mate Junk, at that moment making his appearance from below.

"Well, we sha'n't oblige him in that," said Dareall. "The ship looks of good service. Flinders, bring her about, and let him have a broadside."

This was done, but, unfortunately, Flinders neglected to inform the "Barber" of the nature of the result desired.

The latter, therefore, manned the three star-board broadside guns, sighted them himself, let them go simultaneously at a signal, and potted the enemy so directly on the water-line that she slowly listed over and began to fill at once.

Dick uttered an exclamation of impatience, though he couldn't justly blame the gunner, who was rather proud of his performance.

"Do you surrender?" he called out, as the schooner was run in under the transport's lee.

"I should say I did," was the surly response, in a broad Yorkshire accent, "since I'm sinking. What are you?"

"The Yankee privateer Sea Witch. What are you?"

"The British transport Boomerang, in ballast from Savannah?"

"Get together what you can. We'll send a bout."

The ship was short-handed, there being but eight men aboard besides the skipper and his two mates, all of whom were north country Englishmen.

Having brought them and their personal effects on board the schooner, the transport, which contained little of value, and was moreover fast sinking, was set on fire.

The captured skipper was a tough-looking little man named Martin, with a face like a fox.

"What the deuce did you mean by popping at us with those toy guns?" demanded Dareall, half-angrily. "Couldn't you guess that we could sink you at our pleasure?"

"That is just what I popped away at you for," was the cool reply, in the patois that we shall not attempt to reproduce.

Old Junk slapped his thigh, exclaiming under his breath:

"I guessed it, and I knowed it!"

"What!" cried Dick; "you courted destruction?"

"For that old tub," pointing to the burning craft, "yes."

"Wherefore?"

"Oh, I'm sick of the whole blamed business. We're Democrats, all of us, if we are Englishmen; and the war against you is only popular with our aristocracy. Nothing would suit me better than to be one of you on such a beautiful trim-built free-fighter as you have here," his sailor's eye roved admiringly aloft and aloft; "and I fancy my men are of the same opinion. Isn't that so, mates?"

"That we be!" cried his first mate, a hulking big Northumbrian. "We-uns like liberty as well nor the best of you-uns. Nothing w'd be nearer our hearts than to fight wi' ye ag'in' the king, who is a crazy man no less nor a tyrant, they do say."

The rest of them echoed the sentiment with an eagerness that should have placed the young commander on his guard, but he was too sympathetic and unsophisticated as yet to be so.

"Good enough!" he exclaimed, heartily.

"Your wish shall be gratified. The more the merrier, Mr. Junk, so pray see to the enrollment of these worthy fellows at once."

Junk, no less unsuspicious than he, proceeded to carry out with much zeal, a step which they both had subsequent cause to regret, though Flinders wagged his carotid head slowly and disapprovingly, without venturing to put his protest into audible words.

"Once an Englisher, always an Englisher, Democrat or no Democrat!" he muttered, to himself. "Sleep with one eye open and t'other shut when a Britisher's your bunk-mate. Them's my sentiments."

Leaving the burning ship in her wake, the gallant schooner continued to wing her free way due northeast until daylight, when the echoing sound of cannonading attracted her to northward.

Two vessels were presently perceived by telescope hotly engaged, while several sail were bearing in upon them from seaward.

Fog-eye Flinders dropped his glass after a long and silent observation, and his superior judgment was anxiously awaited.

"French rig and French build, all but one of the two engaged, and she a British sloop-of-war!" was his announcement. "It's Admiral d'Estaing's fleet, or a part of it."

CHAPTER XXI.

HOT WORK.

It seemed scarcely credible that Flinders, even with his exceptional vision, could make out the character and nationality of craft that could only be sighted by telescope, and that but indistinctly, but the event testified to the accuracy of his decision.

When the Sea Witch came upon the fleet at about eight bells, or an hour after breakfast, the engagement was ended with the British sloop-of-war Dreadnaught a prize to the French corvette Charlemagne, though the latter had been materially assisted by another of the fleet in effecting the capture.

The vessels were five of the expected French fleet, including the ship-of-the-line Agincourt with Admiral d'Estaing himself on board, the remainder of the fleet having gone northward to Newport, whither these were to join them later on to coöperate with the American troops in the effort to dislodge the British from their stubborn occupancy of that position.

Admiral d'Estaing, on being apprised of the nature of the Sea Witch's mission, invited the young commander on board his flag ship, where he received him with the utmost kindness and urbanity, being especially glad that his guest could converse fluently with him in his own tongue, inasmuch as he had all of a Frenchman's aversion to every other, though more or less

conversant with several alien languages, including the English.

"You are a privateersman, you tell me, my young friend," observed the admiral in the course of their conversation. "Take care that you are never captured, then, for in that event these brutal English would most likely hang you. What, you sail under a letter-of-marque or reprisal? Then the case is different, though you would still fare uncomfortably."

"I suppose it is different, count," replied Dick. "But I shall surely never be captured in any event. We will fight our ship as long as two planks hold together, or there is a hand left to pull trigger or twirl a capstan-bar."

"Bravely said! bravely said!" and the count smiled pleasantly at the vaunt. "Well, then, let me give you a pointer. But first tell me how long a cruise you are out for?"

"One month. It is our trial cruise. After that we shall most likely scour the West Indies and the Spanish Main at our leisure."

"Excellent! Then from this point let me advise you to make for Hatteras, returning hither by a long curving loop to seaward. This will most probably bring you in the track of many transports and store-ships now passing to and fro from New York incidentally to the English occupation of Savannah. You see I have studied the situation pretty thoroughly."

The Count d'Estaing was not only a distinguished sailor, but an elegant, affable and noble-minded gentleman of the old French régime.

He mostly wore a smile in talking, and his handsome face was charmingly animated, but at the same time there was underneath it all a sadness in the face, a shadow in the shining eyes, as if dimly prophetic of his undeserved doom. Sixteen years later, in the spring of 1794, Dick Dareall sympathetically recalled that lurking sadness and shadow when he learned of the count's death on the guillotine. He had become a suspect to the brutal Jacobin rule for having bravely dared to bear testimony in favor of Marie Antoinette at that unhappy queen's trial in the preceding year, and his own stainless and noble life was the penalty.

After dining with the genial admiral, and conversing with him on many topics, the young privateersman thanked him effusively for his advice, and made his adieux.

The fleet then continued on their course in the direction of Delaware Bay, with their prize, while the Sea Witch, in pursuance with the counsel afforded by the admiral, headed away to the southeast.

The privateer's good luck seemed confirmed from the hour of making the change of course, for it had been her commander's original intention to cruise northward as far as Block Island and Nantucket and return.

She had not parted company with the fleet for more than six hours when she sighted, overhauled and captured without firing a shot the large British store-ship *Thames*, on her way from New York to Savannah with an immense cargo of grain, meal, and salt meat, together with large quantities of fixed ammunition for musketry.

Within two hours of her capture, she was on her way to Havre, with her entire ship's company, thirteen in number, in charge of a competent prize-crew.

Admiral d'Estaing had advised this course as preferable, though the longer, in the disposition of most valuable prizes, except in particular cases, by reason of the closeness with which the enemy's blockade was maintained at the entrance to nearly all American ports of any consequence along the coast.

By midnight two transports, bound from Savannah for New York in ballast, were severally overhauled, captured and fired, after the ship's companies had been made prisoners; after which the bold privateer continued on her way, rejoicing before the freshening northwest wind.

It was hot work, including on the following day the destruction of two more transports in ballast, besides the capture and summary dispatch to France with a prize-crew of a large West Indianman intended for Glasgow, with a rich cargo of coffee, spices, dyestuffs and precious woods.

This prize-crew also carried with them the prisoners made by the capture of the four transports, thus ridding the privateer of having the care of them.

Then there were twenty-four hours' breathing space in the gallant schooner's devastating career, and at dawn of the third day after separating from the French fleet, she found herself under nothing but a half-reefed mainsail in a tremendous mid-summer storm forty miles off Hatteras, but all snug aloft and aloft, and skimming the giant combers like a storm-bird on the wing.

"Was ever anything like her?" observed Dick, who was taking a weak glass of grog with Junk over a study of the chart in the cabin saloon, it being Flinders's watch on deck. "She's no less a beauty in tempest than in sunshine. By Jupiter! hear the yell of that wind," his eyes sparkling with their accustomed dancing light when his vessel was uppermost in his thoughts. "And yet how slightly she lists over, and with hardly

a wave-thump to be heard underneath, fore and aft!"

"That's because she feathers over 'em, instead of plowing through," replied the older sailor, regarding his companion a little severely. "Look here, Captain Dick, you and I have been mess-mates long enough for me to speak my mind without being yard-armed for it, eh?"

"I should rather say so."

"Well, Cap, the Witch is a good 'un, and no mistake; but a man shouldn't love a ship too much, in my humble opinion."

"But can a true sailor love his ship too much, old fellow?"

"Yes, he can."

"Then why shouldn't he love her too much?"

"Because, for one thing, it isn't fair to the women."

Dick burst into his happy laugh.

"But good women are more plentiful than good ships, Salty," he exclaimed. "But, letting that be granted, you said 'for one thing.' Now for another thing, if you have got any to offer."

The old sailor changed his squid from one cheek to the other, leaned forward with his elbows on the chart-table, and looked around him uneasily.

"For another thing, Cap," he said, confidentially, and in a husky voice that was almost a whisper, "it ain't right. The invulnerable powers," solemnly, "don't like it, and it's likely to bring bad luck."

Dick, with his care-free, devil-may-care disposition, was no less surprised than amused at the old fellow's earnestness.

"Oh, fiddlesticks!" he cried. "What is it they don't like, and that's likely to bring bad luck?"

"This here lovin' of a dumb wooden thing as if it was a human, you know. This here worship-in', an' idolizin', an' rollin' up your eyes to, an' floppin' down on your knees to, an' prostratin' yourself before a simple insensate holler fabber-ick of bolted planks an' beams, with a bowsprit for a snout, dead-lights for eyes in the tail, spars for arms, tarred hemp-twist for bowline belt an' shoestrings, sails for flappers—"

Dick interrupted him by another burst of merriment, which was this time a roar.

"Thank you, Salty!" he managed to exclaim at last; "but I was scarcely aware that I worshiped the Witch to quite the extent you make out, much as I admire and love the craft. But, you blessed old son of a sea-cook's stuffed owl! I don't love her in the same way I love a 'human,' as you call it, at all—in the same way that I love Jessie Dearborn, for instance." He made the avowal without a thought of reservation, so well-known was his heart-affair to his fellow-townsmen, among whom everybody's business was everybody's. "And as for the bad luck attending a sailor's honest admiration for the stanch ship in which he fights and sails, I don't believe a word of it—or in any luck at all, good or bad, when it comes to that."

"You don't?" cried Junk, half-aghast at such skepticism in a born sailor.

"Not a bit of it, though I do believe in a Providence that watches over us, and shapes our purposes for ruin or success as it judges best—and, luckily for us, keeping us meanwhile in the dark as to its intentions, so that we are still free agents in our own conceits, at least. But a truce to this empty talk, Salty Junk. I believe so little in luck or fatalism that if, at this very moment, we were threatened with being sent to Davy Jones's Locker by a big hulk suddenly toppling over us from the crest of one of these mountain waves that we are feathering over so securely—"

It was one of those rare moments—rare enough in any lifetime, non-existent in most—when our challenging words are echoed, as it were, by the chancing of the event defied.

He was interrupted in his turn by a call from the lookout in the foremast crow's-nest so loud and shrill as to reach them where they were sitting, even above the shrieking of the gale and the roaring of the waves.

"Ship ahead! Good Lord! she's almost upon us."

Then Jerry Wardlow's boatswain's whistle rung along the deck, there was stumbling of hurried feet on the companionway, and Second Mate Flinders burst into the saloon in an excitement such as he seldom permitted himself to exhibit.

"Cap—Salty—tumble up!" he roared. "A big corvette, half a wreck, and ready to crush us under!"

"I told you so!" growled Junk to himself, as he followed the others, helter-skelter, up the companionway. "No such thing as luck, good or bad, eh? Well, well!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BATTLE IN THE STORM.

FORTUNATELY, Flinders had already given the best order for the emergency, so that the peril was not quite so imminent as had been represented by the time Dick and Salty reached the quarter-deck in his company.

But it was sufficiently terrific, in all conscience.

The Witch, rocking frightfully, had come

dead about, and was just slipping along a deep gulf, or trough, between two gigantic waves.

On the summit of the loftier of these towered, just toppling to its plunge, an immense battleship, only the bulging bows and cutwater of which could be seen on looking up from the schooner's deck, and magnified into colossal or Brobdignagian proportions by the proximity of the calamity she threatened.

"Schooner ahoy!" was roared from somewhere up in the toppling fabric, with a full-mouthed English oath for emphasis; "stand from under!"

Then the Witch slipped from under, and down came the leviathan, just missing the taffrail overhang, and with a splash that sent the brine in cataracts high over her mainmast-peak, drenching her low deck from stem to stern.

It was almost like the bursting of a water-spout.

But the gallant schooner had come about again into her true course like a ruddered cork, and topped the next wave herself as the monster slowly and laboriously climbed the adjacent one, thus affording a good view of her deck.

She was seen to be a large corvette, of fourteen or sixteen guns, showing no flag—the violence of the wind precluded that—and little short of a dismantled wreck.

Her foremast had gone by the board, the wreck and rattle of the main-topmast and main-topgallant were still trailing over her starboard rail, though with men busy cutting it loose, and there was nothing but the mizzen-sail bent to steady her in answer to her wheel, while her only chaser at the bow had burst from its lashings and was playing havoc forward, with fifty or more sailors trying to noose it in.

But Dick's first thought was of the crushing peril the Witch had so narrowly escaped.

"Who was on the lookout?" he sternly demanded.

"Revels."

"Send him aft."

Fog-eye hesitated, scratching his red head with one hand, while holding on against the mad pitching of the vessel with the other.

"Captain Dick," he ventured, "am I privileged to say a word or two?"

"Certainly, old man."

"Ain't my eyes on deck as good as ordinary eyes aloft?"

"I should say so, and a great deal better than the majority."

"Then why should the lookout be brought to book, Cap, for failin' to glimpse from the crow's-nest what I couldn't glimpse from the poop-deck here?"

Dick, though still angry, was silent.

"Harpoons an' fish-hooks, man!" the mate burst out; "look around you, Cap. It is still storm-dark, though past sunrise, and the corvette is practically without mast or sail to show above the troughs she's wallerin' in, like a hog in its pen, when not crestin' the combers!"

"You're right, I suppose, old fellow. Let it go, and make ready for action."

"You'd fight the monster yonder, Cap?"

"And take her, in the bargain!"

"Hooray!"

And the necessary fighting and sailing orders were given.

But the boatswain's shrill whistle had continued to pipe at short intervals, and the schooner, under previously given orders, was being handled beautifully.

The man-of-war had remained close at hand, towering on the crests at intervals over her smaller and lower-lying companion, and that the tussle with the elements had not diminished the predatory instinct in her was at once apparent.

"What craft is that?" was straightway belowered through the trumpet from her tall poop, as she began to climb a tremendous wave.

"The American letter-of-marque *Sea Witch*!" was Dick's roared response. "What ship is that?"

"His Majesty's corvette *Agamemnon*! Lie in close till the storm abates, or we'll blow you out of the water!"

"Go to the devil!"

And, all being in readiness, with the opportunity favorable, old Barbareau let go with the bow-chaser.

The Witch had just dipped into the trough, and it was a good deal like shooting at the zenith.

But the shot told, the round thirty-two-pound bolt ripping along the Britisher's oaken side and knocking the spots out of her starboard fore-chains.

There was a furious and derisive oath from her poop, and then, in spite of the corvette's storm-torn condition, she responded with her entire broadside of eight guns.

A roar of laughter from the privateer's decks as the volleyed iron whizzed harmlessly far over her tops, and then, as she feathered out, going about like a duck, Fog-eye, who had himself taken charge of the stern-chaser, let fly with it, knocking off the corvette's last remaining topmast, leaving nothing above the one standing: sail on the long stump of the mizzen.

"Look here!" was next angrily shouted from the enemy; "you can't fight us, you know. We're double your size and strength."

"Can't we?" was the mocking response. "Mend your manners, if you can't your ship!" And, both vessels chancing the next moment to top opposing swells, the Witch's three-gun broadside was poured unerringly into her giant antagonist's decks.

The result was gratifying—to the Americans. The British tars had just succeeded in lassoing the wild gun—a huge chaser, evidently a forty-pounder, which was an exceptional naval gun for that day—and were laboriously getting it back into position, when one of the shots was seen to prostrate half a dozen of them, free the piece once more, and send it upon its erratic and damaging career about the fore-castle deck, while the two remaining bolts wrecked the combings of the main hatch and tore a big hole into the port bulwarks amidships.

A ringing cheer arose from the privateer's deck, and as she again dipped momentarily from view, the big gun could be heard madly bumping, tearing and pounding about, doubtless to the serious damage of the enemy's deck-works.

There was silence now on board the wreck, so far as further hails were concerned, and, as the privateer again got her opportunity, Barbareau let fly once more with the bow-gun, knocking off her bowsprit.

"Py Shove!" exclaimed the gunner, rubbing his hands delightedly, while another exultant cheer testified to the accuracy of his shot; "at zis rate ve s'all take ze pig ship apart leetle py leetle, or piecemeal, as you say. Ze gun of brass is a good gun, and ze ball of iron is a good ball!"

But the storm had seemed to increase in violence, instead of abating, as had been hoped.

As there was incessant danger in the vessels remaining so close together, Dareall decided to haul off for a mile or so, and then to lie to and keep up a desultory firing until there was a chance of getting in better work—though he was not blind to the fact that a continuance of the tempest was more in his favor than the corvette's.

This was accordingly effected by risking the bending of a spritsail, in addition to the slight steadying canvas the schooner already carried. The maneuver was a success, and then she began to get the new range, and to peg away at her dismantled and unquiet target with stern or bow-chaser, as the case might be, at her leisure.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A MASTER PRIZE.

It was ticklish practice in such a stormy sea, but fully one-half the privateer's shots at long range told, while the corvette was by this time so distressed with her efforts to keep afloat that she made no attempt at replying in kind.

The storm was an unusually violent and protracted one for the time of year.

It lasted all that day, with steadily-growing fury, and the greater part of the ensuing night. Then it began to abate, and with gratifying rapidity, the wind falling off to the west, and the great seas fast subsiding.

The sun rose on the following day in an unclouded sky, and over a still angry but fast calming sea.

The corvette was sighted at last three miles away, and sail was at once made for her, the Witch fairly leaping and soaring along under her novel spread of canvas, like a bird that first tries its wings after a long period of enforced inaction or self-constraint.

"She isn't so much a wreck as I expected to see her," observed Dick, who with his two mates was studying the corvette through the glass.

"She's managed to get up jury-masts, anyway," said Junk. "And there's something of a sail-spread forward now, as well as aft."

"Hold on!" dissented Flinders. "She's no better nor a wreck jest the same, though. Let me tell you that. They must have managed to throw that wild gun overboard. Her deck, fore an' aft, clean to the poop, looks as though it had been swept up and down by wild horses, and I can see our shot-marks all over her port side. She'd still make a rousing prize, though."

"We'll make her one," said Dick, quietly. As they approached nearer, Flinders was found, as usual, to have been right in his observation.

In spite of the jury-masts and extra sail that had been got on her, apparently with immense labor and fortitude, the corvette was practically a hapless wreck upon the subsiding and sun-lighted waves, though doubtless susceptible of restoration.

As the Witch came sheeting down upon her, very like a graceful carrion-bird upon the battered and floating bulk of an expiring whale, she displayed her colors, and then sent in a blithe good-morning of thirty pounds' weight from her bow-gun, which made the splinters fly from the corvette's taffrail.

There was no response. Her officers were seen in an apparently melancholy group on her quarter-deck, while her men seemed listless and disheartened at their posts.

As her crew, however, could not be short of two hundred and fifty men, or thereabouts, it would have been madness to think of leading a boarding assault over her towering side.

But then she had not flung out her colors in response to the privateer's display, and everything about her indicated more or less misery and despair.

"Do you surrender?" shouted Dareall, when within hail.

There seemed to be a hurried consultation among the British officers, and then a tall man, evidently the commander, stepped to the side.

"Well, we're about done up," was his response. "So you might as well come on board."

It was rather a shifty way of surrendering a ship, but seemed somewhat excusable under the circumstances.

Dick laughed, and himself leaped into the long boat, giving the order to lower away.

In five minutes he was on board the unfortunate man-of-war.

A dead silence prevailed among officers and men as he stepped over the rail, unaccompanied, upon the torn and wrecked deck, with more than half the guns dismounted and everywhere rattle of the storm's work lying about.

In fact, it was a pitiable enough thing for so large and gallant a ship, splendidly manned by a brave crew that could as yet have but lost few of their large number, to surrender to a privateer of half her size and strength.

But had she surrendered?

Dick at once recognized among the officers on the half-wrecked poop a young man whom he remembered as one of Romney's midshipmen on board the Hector.

And, without his noticing it, this young man had hurriedly whispered something in the corvette commander's ear that caused the latter's gloomy face to suddenly light up ferociously.

Dick, in the mean time, confidently mounted the quarter-deck, and with a respectful, though sailor-like bow to the crestfallen officers, held out his hand for the captain's sword.

"Gentlemen," said he, cheerily, "it does seem the devil's own luck for you, but the storm has contributed far more to your defeat than my gallant craft yonder, if I say it myself. And since you have seen fit to surrender at discretion, I shall take the utmost pleasure in treating you all with—"

"Surrender!" suddenly thundered the British commander, in interruption, and he sprang forward, whipping out his sword. "I told you to come on board, but who spoke of surrender? Seize this scoundrel, some of you! He is Dareall, the Jersey coast pirate! That is the business!" as a dozen or more of the tars rushed upon the privateersman from behind. "Hurrah, Wilkins!" to his gunner, who, with his assistants, was already at the only unimpaired broadside, which happened to bear directly on the Witch, now less than a cable's-length away; "sink the infernal hell's craft with what there is left of us on the spot! Give it to her!"

But his own officers had remained more or less irresolute, though the tars were responsive enough to the treachery in the main, and Dick, after leaping high in the air with a shout and a gesture that was sufficiently understood by his associates on the schooner, had wheeled with the rapidity of lightning, sword in hand.

The two foremost of his would-be assailants went down under successive thrusts, following so close upon each other as scarcely to be separated with the eye, another fell prostrate with a bullet in the forehead—a left-handed shot from the pistol as hastily snatched from his belt—yet a fourth reeled back under the discharged weapon hurled with bone-smashing force into his face; and then, with a couple of bounds he was with his back to the taffrail combings, his sword playing out with such cleverness that two more of them were wounded, while the rest were effectually kept at bay.

"Treacherous British hounds!" he roared in the course of this unlooked-for manifestation; "a Jersey Coast pirate, am I? Come and take me then, whosoever dares!"

At this instant the corvette's broadside was thundered out.

But the Witch, snatching the warning in time, had spun around into the wind like a charmed and sentient thing, the entire volley missing her by less than a rod.

Then bang! whiz! and her stern-chaser had poured a shower of shrapnel along the corvette's crowded decks amidships with terrific effect.

The Britishers were fairly bewildered by the startling rapidity of this action, but the Witch was not done yet.

She had sheeted out from under the monster's quarter like magic, come about, and in another instant her dauntless little broadside was delivered upon the enemy's poop.

The commander himself tottered forward, his head carried away by a round-shot, his midshipman adviser was down fairly disemboweled, and the remaining shot ripped the remainder of the poop-coping into jack-straws.

"Good God, sir!" cried a lieutenant, springing appealingly toward Dick; "stop this carnage. We were not parties to this infernal treachery!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE WIND-UP OF A MEMORABLE CRUISE.

Dick had continued to keep the jack-tars at bay with his tremendous sword-play, and now the latter drew off, looking sullen and dazed.

"Do you mean what you say?" he sternly demanded, of the officer who had made the appeal.

"By Heaven, I do!" was the earnest response.

And the remainder of the officers crowded around, their faces sufficiently expressive of their honesty.

"Are you in chief command now?" was Dick's next demand of the first speaker.

"Yes; I am the first lieutenant, now in command by the death of Captain Ponsonby."

"Your sword, if you please?"

And, sheathing his own blood-stained weapon, the commander of the Sea Witch held out his hand.

The lieutenant's sword was promptly surrendered.

"Pray retain it at my request," continued Dick, returning the weapon. "But I will say that if your treacherous commander were now in your place, instead of lying yonder headless, as he deserves, instead of treating him as I am treating you, I would right cheerfully stab him to the heart with his own sword."

He then sprang on the taffrail and waved his hand to his fellow-privateersmen.

He was too late to forbid a second broadside, just then on the point of being discharged, and which again swept the corvette's deck amidships, this time canister, and with murderous effect.

Then she came alongside, her rovers poured over the starboard bulwarks, and the prize was forthwith taken possession of.

Considering the comparative weakness of the privateer, it was an immense one in point of importance.

The corvette was a full ship-rigged man-of-war, of seventeen fine guns, not including the wild forty-pounder bow-gun which had been thrown overboard. While her spars and rigging were hopelessly gone, her hull, comparatively new, was substantially intact, and she had been provisioned and stored with ammunition for a protracted cruise. Her ship's company had consisted of two hundred and seventy-five veteran seamen and officers, of whom twenty were dead by war or accident. Of those remaining, thirty-five were pressed American sailors from along the coast. All of these manifested the utmost desire to join the privateer, which was thus enabled to more than make up the draft that had been made upon her ship's company in the furnishing of various prize-crews.

The lieutenant, who had enjoyed a brief moment of chief command by the death of the captain, was an agreeable and gentlemanly officer named Mordred, but with the aristocratic prejudices of his class.

"You say," observed Dareall, in talking with him shortly after the surrender, "that your captain's name was Ponsonby?"

"Yes," replied Lieutenant Mordred; adding in a tone of awe: "And he was second brother to a duke, sir—the Duke of Glamorganshire!"

"I wouldn't have cared a curse if he had been second or first brother to a duke like George Lamson, or to a London Jew named Pexman," Dick, contemptuously. "If he had taken me into my hands, I'd have put him down like a pirate! What do you suppose could have prompted him to attempt that cowardly and treacherous piece of business?"

Lieutenant Mordred looked somewhat lowered, and couldn't exactly say. He recognized something as to Dick's partial reputation among the British, hinted that the noble earl's indiscretion might have been noted to sudden frenzy, and was venturing upon other evasive remarks in a similarly exculpatory strain when the young commander turned on his heel, and left him in disgust.

Notwithstanding the importance of this capture, it seemed likely to prove a serious embarrassment to the privateer, by reason of the largeness of the prize-crew that would have to be spared for manning and sailing her into port, to say nothing of the care of the prisoners and the preliminary repairs to be made, when a fortunate incident occurred to relieve her of the predicament.

In little more than an hour after the capture, a sail was reported to seaward, which speedily resolved itself into that of a large vessel, most likely a frigate, approaching the spot under a great press of sail.

If a frigate, what could she be but a Britisher?

Instantly, in this assumption, there was the bustle of new preparations on board the Witch, to fight or fly as the circumstances might dictate, when a word or two from the far-sighting Fog-eye Flinders reassured everybody.

"Don't jump out of your skins!" he drawled, after a second observation of the stranger through the glass. "It ain't a Britisher at all; it's a Frenchman."

He proved correct, as usual.

The new-comer upon the scene was one of the vessels that had been with Admiral d'Estaing at the time of Dareall's visit to the latter—the

forty-gun French frigate *Revolution*, Captain Achille Delamont commanding, that was temporarily separated from its squadron in a brief cruise southward after profit and glory, neither of which she had yet succeeded in achieving.

Astounded at the success of the comparatively insignificant *Sea Witch*, captain Delamont, after a brief conference with her young commander, in which the nature of the latter's embarrassment was made known, proposed an offer to him that was immediately accepted.

It was to provide for repairing the *Agamemnon* and sending her to Brest, together with all the prisoners, by a prize crew from his own frigate, in the interest of the American Government and the privateer, as a matter of course, but on condition that the *Revolution* should have a percentage on the valuation of the corvette as awarded by the admiralty court.

"It's a white elephant off our hands," Dareall explained to his officers and men an hour later, when the *Witch* was sheeting away, leaving her master prize in the Frenchman's possession. "Much as it would have been to our glory to have carried her with us into an American port, it would have been little short of impossible by reason of the blockaders, to say nothing of her wrecked condition and the mob of prisoners we would have had to care for."

"True enough," observed the first mate. "Doubtless we'd have had to burn her in the end, whereas now we've a chance of prize-money from her in solid chunks."

Flinders said nothing, though he looked as if he would rather have seen the corvette, thus peaceably and perhaps profitably disposed of, committed to the flames forthwith.

As Dareall and Junk were entering the cabin together, the former turned to the other with a smile.

"By the way, Salty," said he, "how about that invariable bad luck attending a sailor's affection for his craft now?"

"Well, sir," replied the mate, not a little confused, "the corvette did come mighty nigh to smothering down on us from the top of that big wave, as you must acknowledge."

"Ah! but she didn't, and we captured her at last—probably the biggest sea-prize of the war thus far—as you must acknowledge."

"Oh, dang the luck, anyway! what does it differ, Cap, if you're on the winning side?" cried the old sailor, losing most of his patience and half of his temper. "But I do stick to what I said about the invincible powers, and to much love for a senseless and inanerate thing. They don't like it!"

Dick burst into his gay laugh.

"But do the Britishers like it any better?" was his last retort; and Salty went for a glass of grog without vouchsafing a rejoinder.

The *Witch* was now put on a seaward course, for the purpose of making that grand loop on her home-stretch that had been advised by Admiral d'Estaing.

For two weeks following, she had but a meager continuance of her success, three unimportant prizes being all that were added to her list in that period.

Her ship's company began to grow lazy or discontented, and the outlook for the wind-up was not promising.

But as the Northwestern side of the loop-course was taken up, and the coast-waters were once more approached, the face of privateering affairs began to brighten considerably.

But at this juncture an unpleasant incident occurred.

One night, when everything was very quiet, with the schooner bowling along on her starboard tack in the teeth of a rather stiff north-west wind, Jerry Wardlow appeared unexpectedly in the cabin where Dareall chanced to be sitting alone.

"Friend Dick," said he, with his old-time mock solemnity, "these needst not worry greatly, but there's trouble in the fore-castle."

CHAPTER XXV.

TROUBLE IN THE FORECASTLE.

DAREALL looked up in no little surprise.

"What sort of trouble, Jerry?" he demanded.

"But sit down and mix yourself a glass first, if you wish to."

Did Jerry wish to? The distribution of grog on the *Sea Witch* had been made from the very first with a wisely sparing hand, and the members of the *Collingwood*, though patriotic and careful enough, had time and time again vouchsafed to the Red Lion in *Pom's River*, or other small tributaries of the little inn by the coast, with a prize-money in his purse, his bonnet, and his jokes, Jamaica rum or other circulating with equal freedom and impunity.

He at once plumped himself down at the table, seized decanter and glass and sugar-bowl, and was speedily busied with the concoction of a glass of grog of such heroic proportions as to excite both his companion's wonder and amusement.

"What sort of trouble?" demanded the young commander again.

"Friend Dick," Jerry stirred the mixture lovingly, tasting it by spoonfuls while he talked, "these doubtless remembers the North Country

Englishers—skipper, two mates and eight men—who were so rejoiced at having us sink their empty transport for them that they joined our ship's company forthwith?"

"Of course, I do—Martin and the others of the *Boomerang*?"

"The same ducks, Friend Dick."

"Well, what of them? Ah! I recollect you said something of their manifesting lukewarmness during our storm-fight with the corvette?"

"Friend Dick, thee hast a good memory."

"But that was perhaps but natural on the part of the fellows," observed Dick. "No man would particularly rejoice at fighting against his old flag at a pinch, you know."

"True," with a long draught at his glass this time, "but there's worse than that since, Friend Dick."

"Worse?"

"Truly."

"What is it?"

"They are plotting mutiny."

Dareall stared.

"What!" he exclaimed; "this handful of men?"

Jerry here slowly finished his glass by a series of ecstatic swallows, rubbing his stomach and rolling his eyes upward with a beatified expression.

"A handful may become a basketful by contact, Friend Dick," he at least vouchsafed to remark in response; "and there's more discontent in the fore-castle than perhaps you imagine—especially among the foreigners apart from these Englishers—the Spaniards, South Americans, Italians, Portuguese, and the like."

"What of that?" cried Dareall, indifferently.

"All told, they don't make up a fourth of our crew."

"True, friend Dick. But even a small minority of a ship's crew, if thoroughly organized, without exciting the suspicions of the others—"

"Out with your news, and be done with your cursed preliminaries!" exclaimed Dareall, with an impatient, "Drop that rum-bottle, too! You've had enough. There!" snatching away the decanter, which Jerry was already fondling afresh. "Now what have you got to say?"

Wardlow at once straightened up, and told his story in few words.

Revels, a trustworthy seaman, had overheard the Englishmen plotting together in secret the night before.

Their design was to await the next fight with a British armed vessel, which they seemed to feel confident would take place before the end of the cruise, and then in the heat of the engagement to create a diversion in the enemy's favor by a sudden rising.

That was the gist of what Jerry had to report.

Dareall was both angered and surprised, as he had never anticipated any trouble of the sort in the remotest degree.

"Revels is a good man," he said, after a reflective pause. "He wouldn't misreport or exaggerate so grave an affair as this, I am sure."

"Not he," cried Jerry, a little huskily now. "There's no better aboard than Revels of Abscon."

"Has any one else chanced to observe any of this plotting?"

"Yes, Friend Dick—Jackson."

"Ah! another trustworthy man?"

"No better."

Junk and Flinders were called in for consultation.

At first flush the former was for clapping the Englishmen in irons forthwith, while the patriotic Flinders, who had never approved of their enrollment, strongly advised hanging them all on the spot, without examination or trial, as the most summary and felicitous way out of the difficulty.

But, apart from the inhumanity of either such off-hand proceedings, Dareall reminded them that the poison of the mutinous plot might have already reached a larger portion of the ship's company than they had any idea of, and that the only course to make sure of its extent lay in patience, watchfulness, and, above all, in pretending to be wholly unsuspecting of what was afoot.

It was finally agreed that the boatswain, assisted by Revels and Jackson, should keep up a cautious but lynx-eyed watch upon the Englishmen in their communication with other members of the crew, and report the results of their observations in the cabin from time to time.

Dareall and his two mates would be no less vigilant and on their guard, and, in the event of another armed Britisher being sighted and engaged, everything should be in readiness to meet the threatened treachery, the leading men among the American portion of the crew being likewise taken into confidence on the subject beforehand.

The event was not far away that was to put the matter to the test, though it was not the very next one destined to break the comparative monotony of the last two weeks' cruise.

On the following morning a store-ship, in half but valuable cargo, was captured without any difficulty and sent off to France.

As the *Witch* came into the coast waters vessels were more plentiful, and the Britishers among them were not a few.

By noon of the same day, two small transports, northward-bound, one in ballast, the other half-cargoed with Georgia turpentine, were seized and burnt, the latter making a magnificent blaze.

But at sunrise of the following day an American barque, the *George Washington*, outward bound from Philadelphia, and having luckily escaped the blockaders thus far, was hailed, which brought a bad piece of news.

This was to the effect that Lieutenant Romney and all the prisoners taken by the capture of the *Jezebel* and the *Cormorant* had effected their escape from the place of their confinement in Philadelphia on the night of the great storm of more than a fortnight previous—doubtless the same storm the close of which had witnessed the corvette *Agamemnon* a prize to the privateer. Nor was this the worst.

They had also seized upon a brigantine lying at the Callowbill street wharf, in which it was known that they had succeeded in reaching New York three days later. And it was rumored that, under the incentive of this escape, a large British frigate, with some smaller vessels, all under Romney's command, were already on their way to wreak a terrible reprisal by laying waste the shores of Barnegat Bay.

When Dareall received this appalling intelligence, he was a hundred and fifty miles south-east of Cape Henlopen, and fifty or more further from Barnegat.

With mingled rage and alarm, he at once laid his course direct for Barnegat, and the wind, having shifted favorably, being southeast by east, and dead on the schooner's starboard quarter—her best sailing point—every stitch was crowded on her that she could bear.

Not only the two mates, but almost the entire crew, especially the American majority—being Jersey coastmen themselves—partook of the anxiety and suspense with the keenest solicitude.

And naturally enough! The laying waste of the bay-shore hamlets and farms by so powerful and vindictive an expedition as had been indicated signified nothing less than ruin of home and scattering of families for many a brave and hardy fellow on board.

Dick's thoughts were naturally chiefly concerned for his mother and Jessie.

Striving as best he could to master all outward manifestations of his mental agony, he paced the poop like a caged tiger, every now and then looking up at the towering heights of bellying canvas overhead, and grinding his heel on the deck in his agony of impatience and almost despair.

"Has the foul fiend got into the craft?" he muttered between his teeth. "Why, she only creeps!"

And the *Witch* all the time, having her best foot foremost, was fairly flying through the water, flinging the spray from her quarter, and drenching her wild-haired nymph of a figure-head with it from head to foot, like a mad sea-born steed on a runaway for life and freedom through the weltering wastes.

While he was in this unenviable mood, Flinders, after eying him sympathetically for a few moments, went abruptly up to him, and grasped his hand with a gravity and earnestness that was not usual with him.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN INTERCEPTION.

"DICK," said the second mate, "I know just how you feel. But bear up, and be a man—your own brave, confident self! You *must* do it, for there is no other safe or effective course."

Dareall gritted his teeth hard, and then, more or less surprised at the other's unwonted earnestness, he managed to control himself sufficiently to say, hoarsely:

"But you *can't* know how I feel, Fog-eye! It is impossible that you should."

"It ain't impossible, and I do know. You're chiefly tormented about Jessie and your mother."

"True, true; but you *can't* understand my emotions—you *can't* know how I am tormented about them, and about Jessie especially."

"I tell you I can, for I feel just the same way, and on like lines."

"You?"

"Yes. Shall I tell you why?"

"Do, then."

"Because I am in love myself."

There was that in his voice and manner that precluded any thought of deriding the announcement. And yet the idea of freckled, red-haired, slab-sided Fog-eye Flinders being in love!

Dick momentarily forgot his own anxiety in wonder at it.

"You in love with any one?" was all he could say.

"Yes, I. You remember, of course," with sudden eagerness, "the girl I snatched out of the water after we had carried this craft from the enemy by bloody fight—the black-eyed beauty, Naomi Goldheart? I love that girl—I love her to madness, and I am going to win her or die!"

As he said this his form dilated, his strange eyes flashed, and there was no longer coarseness

or homeliness in his face, for the fierce, manly fire that flushed and kindled in it.

Dareall was at once reminded of the heroic transfiguration he had marveled at in this man in that last desperate fight for the schooner's poop-deck. And then he called to mind associatively Naomi's fascinated stare and the way her eyes had followed the man's figure throughout the fray.

"Now you understand, I suppose," continued Flinders, in much of his ordinary tone, "whether I can appreciate your feelings or not. Be a man, Dick!"

And he strode away without another word.

"By Jupiter, I will be a man!" muttered the young commander, resolutely; and he stamped his foot on the deck for the last time, after which he rapidly regained his self-control. "That brave fellow's example has taught me a lesson which I am ashamed to have needed. But it is hard!"

Here Junk, making his appearance from below, came up to offer his sympathy after another fashion.

"You must cheer up, Cap!" he said, with his accustomed gruffness. "We're all in the same ship in distress just now—that is, we Barnegaters. But we must cheer up, and I haven't a doubt that we'll make the inlet in time to give warning."

"I am cheering up, Salty," replied Dick, altogether his calm, iron self by this time; "and neither do I have a doubt that we shall be there in time."

But it was not to be.

They made a magnificent run that day, but on the following morning, when less than fifty miles off Barnegat, a sail came down on them from the north which speedily resolved itself into a large armed brigantine, flying the British colors and spoiling for a fight.

Dick turned fairly pale at the idea of a detention at this critical juncture, and for a single moment he was half disposed to give the order to bear away, and show the stranger his craft's silver heels.

But the Sea Witch to show the white feather in the face of a foe evidently but little her superior in size and armament!

Not to be thought of.

Besides, here was the longed-for opportunity to test the fidelity of a portion of his crew, already under suspicion.

The next instant Barnegat, his sweetheart, his mother, were severally effaced for the time being from heart and mind at the stern call of honor and of duty.

Flinders smiled approvingly at divining the emotional self-conquest which his young commander had achieved.

"What do you make of her?" calmly demanded Dick, the stranger being then five miles away.

"Her rig speaks for itself," was the prompt reply, as Flinders lowered his glass. "Furthermore, she's a ten or twelve gunner, a decent sailer, and she wants to fight."

"I guess we can accommodate her," said the young commander, with a smile. "Mr. Junk" (Salty had the watch), "bring us over so as to cross her course, and then pipe to quarters."

While this was being done, both Dick and Fog-eye exchanged a secret signal with Boatswain Wardlow, who responded in kind, as much as to say, "We're on the watch. Will communicate with you as soon as I can without exciting the plotters' attention."

Dareall then went below alone, where Jerry, after duly piping to quarters, presently joined him.

"They think I'm here begging for grog," said the latter. "So that my being here with you won't give away our being up to snuff in the least, Friend Dick."

Dareall took the hint, and himself poured him out a tumbler of rum also showing him the sugar-bowl, after which he clapped the decanter into the steward's locker, and shut the door on it.

"Are they organized?" he demanded, abruptly.

"Come low, Jerry; no superfluous words."

"Yes," replied Jerry, promptly enough, for all that he was sipping his grog, "and ready for business."

"How many are in the plot?"

"Thirty-two."

"What! exclusive of the eleven Britishers?"

"No; all told."

"Who are the outsiders they have rung in?"

"The two Spaniards, one of our Portuguese, twelve Italians, the Jamaica nigger, the three Germans, and all the Greeks and Turks."

"Humph! Any of the Irishmen into it?"

"Not a bog-trotter of 'em! I wish that all the foreign world might be as true to the American cause as the 'ould sod' of Erin is!"

"Good! what is the specific plan of the plotters?"

"To wait till we are hottest engaged—in a boarding fight, if possible—and then to collect together at a given signal on the part of Martin, and to strike out from in our midst under his leadership."

"What is the signal?"

"Three whooping Yorkshire yells, or screeches, in rapid succession from Martin."

"Ah, we'll have a throtter or two for that screech-owl's warning. Give me half a dozen names of the men you consider as natural leaders, or who are most looked up to, among our American lads."

Jerry had only half finished his grog, and he began to tell off the required names reflectively on his fingers.

"There's Revels, and there's Jackson—both from down Absecon ways," he replied, slowly. "Then there's Ferris, from Squam, there's Johnson, from Shark River, there's tough old Jonas Pringle, from our own old Barnegat reaches, and there's—there's," with a glimmering smile, "that no-account fraud of a sprig from the Tory Collingford stock, Jerry Wardlow, who is perhaps better liked than any of the others named. There, thee hast it all, friend Dick!"

Dareall grasped his hand.

"And last not least!" he exclaimed, heartily. "That will do, Jerry Junk, Flinders and I will be on the sharp lookout. Secretly notify the men you have named at once, and let them put the Americans on guard with due caution. At our signal—which will nip Yorkshire Martin's in the bud—let them be in readiness to turn suddenly on the collecting foreigners tooth and nail."

"And our signal, friend Dick?"

"An American yell from one of the three of us."

They then separated, Jerry skulking off to the fore-castle, wiping his lips, as if his grog-seeking enterprise had been a perfect success, and Dareall hurrying back to the quarter-deck where Junk and Flinders were at once placed in possession of the facts.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FOEMEN FORE AND AFT.

WHEN Dareall reached the poop-deck again, the stranger was sheeting in, head on, about three miles away, the Witch was just about crossing his course in a diagonal direction, and old Barbareau was sighting the bow-chaser for an initial shot.

Bang! went the gun.

The iron sphere ricocheted thrice over the dancing crests, and then the brigantine's fore-topmast was down, with its topsail, topgallant and royal tangling and beating among the forestays and shrouds.

"That's the music!" cried Dareall, while a cheer went up from the privateer's deck. "Her headgear is the place to spoil her beauty. Round out, Mr. Junk, and we'll try it again with our stern barker."

The order was given, but almost instantly there was a puff from the Britisher's bows, and his iron response harmlessly dashed up the spray within a dozen feet of the cutwater.

"Aha!" commented Dick; "a close shot, and she can throw thirty-twos no less than we. But a miss is as good as a mile. Now for it, Flinders!"

The mate was already at the glistening brass breech of the Long Tom, a gunner's assistant at hand, burning match in readiness.

It was let go, there was a splintering on the stranger, and the remainder of his foremast, probably short off at the deck, was seen to topple and tumble forward, its masses of sails and rigging a ruin on the bowsprit line.

Another cheer from the Americans, a perceptible slackening up in the brigantine's speed, and then the Witch rounded to and paid off to windward, letting go her broadside as she did so, but only one ball of which hit the mark, somewhere amidships as near as could be made out.

These tactics were now continued, the Witch, untouched as yet and having her antagonist practically at her long-range mercy, keeping off, and from time to time sending in shot after shot from one or another of her chasers, for the most part with telling effect.

And now a certain restlessness was remarked on the part of Martin and his immediate confederates.

It was sufficiently obvious that this long-range fighting was little to their taste; they would doubtless have no chance but this one; and they were impatient for the closer and hotter work that would, as they thought, give them their coveted opportunity.

But everything was in readiness to block the treacherous game contemplated, and already the Americans in the crew, including a number of the honestest foreigners, were observed to be warily and quietly on the alert.

At last there wasn't a topmast left standing on the brigantine, to say nothing of the complete elimination of her entire foremast, as mentioned, and the Witch rapidly lessened the interval, firing with additional good effect, and only napping two shots in return—both in the starboard fore-chains, and neither with damaging effect.

The privateer's next delivery, at less than a mile, sent the enemy's bowsprit into splinters.

Yet another from her bow-gun was seen to strike fire from the anchor triced to the Britisher's prow, and to rip off a yard of bulwark-line in the rebound.

Then as she poured in her broadside with good

effect on coming about, there was no immediate reply, and it was easy to see with the naked eye that the utmost confusion was rife on the enemy's decks.

Indeed, her upper works were now thoroughly dismantled, she was like a bird diswinged, and, as the wind had fallen off considerably, she could no longer maneuver, and was practically at the schooner's mercy.

It was doubtless as good a time as any to bring the threatened mutiny to a head, for the purpose of decapitation.

"Boats out!" suddenly roared Dick, while a last shot from the Witch's stern-chaser raked the enemy fore and aft, unshipping his bow-gun.

"Boarders to the front!"

It was only a ruse, and was luckily understood as such by the Americans of the crew, while the plotters were piggishly obtuse.

Martin and his north countrymen had kept together thus far, and now the remainder of the plotters could be perceived going over to them one by one.

In response to the sham order, Jerry sounded his boatswain's whistle, and, under Dick's and Junk's personal lead respectively, there was a hurried rush of more than half the Americans to either side as the boats were being swung out on their davits with a great show of eagerness and zeal.

At this instant there was a loud screech from the soxy-faced Yorkshireman's throat.

Before the two others that were to constitute his signal could follow, however, Fog-eye Flinders, who had been left alone on the poop-deck with the man at the wheel, gave utterance to a yell, compared with which the Englishman's was no more than a whisper.

It would have discounted the yell of a wounded panther in defense of her young.

The ruse was at an end, every American turning suddenly from the boats, jackknife, boarding-pike, hatchet or belaying-pin in hand, while the conspirators were noticeably embarrassed and bewildered.

"Now!" roared Dareall, and, leading the torrent-like rush upon the traitors, he forthwith gripped Martin by the throat, and stabbed him to the heart, with the brief words, "Traitor! spy!" hissed through his teeth as the accompaniment of the blow.

The conflict that ensued was desperate, but short.

The would-be mutineers in some instances had just time to draw their weapons, but that was all.

They were overwhelmed, shot, cut and stabbed down without mercy, and before they could strike a blow in return.

The slaughter was, perhaps, brutal, but none the less just and necessary.

A ship with stealthy and organized mutiny in the bosom of her crew is no safer than a powder magazine with a slow-match burning and curling its snake-like way in among the stored kegs.

In less than a minute every man of them was slain but one, and he, a Spaniard, mortally wounded, confessed before dying the full details of the plot, in corroboration of the timely information that had defeated it, and in justification of the bloody punishment that had been meted out.

"Now for legitimate business!" cried Dareall at the end.

Leaving the men, under Wardlow's directions, to summarily dispose of the dead, and obliterate the marks of the tragedy, he returned to the quarter-deck in Junk's company, and in five minutes the loyal crew, lessened in number, but breathing more freely, were again at their posts.

"It was bloody, but it was just!" commented Barbareau among his assistant gunners. "Sacre bleu! ve sal half something like zat in Paris before long, only on ze grand, ze magnifique scale, wiz ze aristocrats to ze lamp-posts and ze royalty to ze block!" And he was correct in his prediction, as was soon borne out by the terrible march of events.

"Bedad, but you're right, Frenchy!" cried Kelly, one of the best handlers of the starboard broadside. "Who iver trusts a Sassenach Englishman whin he professes good faith in any cause but that of his king or quane, trusts a snake—and, glory to St. Patrick! there be no snakes in ould Ireland."

The Witch was now enabled to run in still closer upon her enemy, and to pour in shot after shot, broadside after broadside, with terrific effect, and with little or no reply.

Indeed, the brigantine, though cleared of her topmast and other wreckage, could no longer come about, or be worked to any advantage.

At last even her colors were shot away, and the broadside that directly followed chanced to plant its three twenty-fours simultaneously in her mainmast, which immediately went by the board.

"What ship is that?" called out Dick, as the Witch was at last run in and rounded to within less than three cable-lengths.

"His Majesty's armed brigantine Queen Bess," was the sullen answer from the enemy's poop.

"Do you surrender?"

"What craft are you?"

"The American letter-of-marque privateer Sea Witch."

"See you to the devil first!"

But Flinders, who was at the stern-gun, then bearing full upon the brigantine's port quarter, had anticipated the answer, and now let fly with it.

There was a crash, a shower of splinters, then a terrific explosion.

The enemy's fore-castle magazine had been knocked to pieces and blown up.

Before the smoke cleared away, the same sullen voice was heard from the poop-deck.

"We surrender!" it shouted; "and be cursed to you!"

CHAPTER XXVIII. HOMEWARD BOUND.

As Dareall's anxieties with regard to home affairs revived, the work of taking possession of the prize and deciding her fate was expedited with the utmost dispatch.

H. M. S. Queen Bess was an old and comparatively dilapidated vessel, though a good sailer, pressed into service and equipped to meet the growing emergencies of the war of invasion.

She carried twelve guns, all old and partly worn out, and a ship's company of eighty men, chiefly composed of English and Scots, with Lieutenant-Commander Mazewell, a brave but not very prudent officer, in command, assisted by a sailing-master, as his second in command, and four midshipmen.

Soon after her occupation by the victors, the Queen Bess was found to be rapidly sinking—in fact, to be beyond hope—from several gaping shot-wounds inflicted at the water-line on her starboard side.

She was, therefore, forthwith given to the torch as soon as the prisoners, her best boats and a choice selection from her stores, ammunition and equipment could be transferred to the Sea Witch.

Then the bold privateer once more sheeted away on her homeward course, after a detention of not more than eight hours since the first sighting of the unfortunate brig a while from the crow's nest.

The latter had quitted New York four days previous to her capture, and the news vouchsafed by her officers was such as to vastly enhance the uneasiness of the Americans, and their desire to reach Barnegat Bay at the earliest hour possible.

It was to the effect that Romney's expedition of reprisal had sailed the week previous, and had in all probability already wreaked its revengeful purpose.

Still, there had been numerous baffling southern gales along the coast, which might possibly have scattered or delayed the expedition.

One valuable acquisition obtained by the capture of the brigantine was found in the person of her surgeon, a Scotch-American and sound patriot of professional ability, named Mackenzie, who had been forced into the British service sorely against his will and sentiments.

He gladly enlisted on the privateer as assistant to Dr. Ferguson, her commissioned surgeon, and also a Scotch-American, who had served during the entire cruise, and who had thus far been frequently overworked, chiefly in assisting in the care of the enemy's wounded that had come into the victorious American's hands.

The Witch was making a superb run, the wind on her port quarter from the southeast by east, when it suddenly occurred to Dareall and his two mates to ask themselves what they should do, if on arriving off the inlet, it should be found that the hostile expedition, with the powerful frigate at its head, should have already begun its devastating work up in the bay.

Dick and Flinders were at first impulsively in favor of following in at all hazards, and risking a battle even against such tremendous odds, with simply their superior sailing powers and knowledge of the intricate, shoal-strewn bay waters to their advantage.

But old Salty Junk gravely shook his head.

"You talk like boys—like powder-monkeys!" he exclaimed, impatiently. "Do you want to wind up your glorious cruise by downright, bang-up annihilation? It would never do—it ain't to be thought of!"

"You haven't got either mother or girl up in the bay!" cried Dick.

"Even your house is two miles back of the cove!" echoed Flinders, with a sneer. "They'd hardly reach your folks!"

But the first mate kept his temper admirably, after his fashion, and continued to argue the cause of wisdom and sanity against that of temerity and desperation.

"That be blowed!" he said, contemptuously. "Both of you ought to know me too well to suppose as how I'd be acterated by individual motives in a life an' death question like this. No, sir-ees! I sha'n't stand by an' see the purtiest, gallantest craft as ever swarmed sailed right inter the jaws of destruction after the most successful short privateering cruise on record, while I've a sea-leg left to stand on. You hear me, both on you!"

His wiser counsel at length prevailed.

This was finally to the effect that, in the event

of the expedition having already begun its ravaging work, the Sea Witch was to hover outside the inlet, and trust to what luck the fates might send for attacking the various vessels as they should make their exit one by one.

This was, perhaps, not the most melodramatic advice, but both Dareall and Flinders, notwithstanding how deeply their anxieties were still enlisted in the near and dear ones imperiled, felt somewhat more settled and fortified after having acquiesced in it.

Before dawn of the following morning they were but ten miles off the inlet, with the clouds piling up threateningly in the southeast, from which the wind was hourly freshening, freighted with suggestions of storm and rain.

Dick, his mates and the two surgeons were already pacing the poop-deck in the extremities of suspense, while the uneasiness of the men on watch, nearly all of whom had left friends or relatives up along inshore, was betrayed by their restless but silent movements, with a proneness to gaze eagerly through the darkness in the direction where Long Beach and Island Beach should be stretching their long, slightly curving cimeters of sand north and south as a watch-guard over the inner bay, with the gleaming inlet opening between the points.

Old Junk took a comprehensive glance around, and, moistening his forefinger, held it over his head.

"Storm—storm and rain!" he observed, half to himself, and first breaking a silence that was growing painful. "A big and perhaps whirling gale from the south-southeast, and plenty of it. Well, all the better for us, in all likelihood."

They did not answer, or seem to specially care just then.

Suddenly a lurid light was remarked in the northwest, which rapidly increased in extent and somber effulgence.

In a short time the entire heavens in that quarter were filled with the lurid reflection, other and minor flares were springing up one by one down along the western sky-line.

There could no longer be any doubt as to the ominous significance of this.

"Tom's River is already gone!" groaned Dick, clinching his hands, and bringing his iron resolution to the calming of his excitement with but indifferent success. "And there go the farm-houses and fishermen's huts one by one. Did ever the torch of war spare anything," bitterly, "when wielded by an accursed Britisher? We are too late!"

"Don't forget, though, Cap," interposed Junk, encouragingly, "that we have been expecting it, and ought to bear up now that the worst is before us."

Flinders had silently gritted his teeth.

"True enough," said he. "The cowardly incendiary hounds! Let us bear it like men, and be patient for our revenge!"

The strange hero-like transformation was upon him, and there was a veiled terrible in his words.

Then as the day dawned, sullen and dark, the lurid effulgence slowly paled or was resolved into rolling clouds of dense black smoke, brightened here and there by the reflection of flames from underneath.

A little later on, the familiar inlet was sighted with the glass, while the lookout called down from his giddy perch that a sail was therein, probably just coming out of the bay.

Every glass on the quarter-deck was at once directed upon it with the intensest interest.

A mere glimmering white speck at first, it steadily and rapidly enlarged as the Witch came sheeting in with her superb speed before the ever-freshening wind.

At last Flinders's face, from wearing an odd, puzzled look, took on a surprised expression.

"Harpoons and fish-hooks!" he exclaimed, with his accustomed nasal drawl and favorite oath, as he lowered his glass; "if it ain't she, may I be biled in whale-oil and sold for a sardine!"

"Which? what?" cried Dareall, while all the others looked up expectant. "What do you make her out to be?"

"The Mist Witch."

"The Mist Witch?"

"Sure pop!"

"But it seems incredible. Look again, Flinders!"

"I wasn't aware as how I was in the habit of making mistakes in the squinting line," grunted Fog-eye, but he briefly leveled his glass again for form's sake. "It's as I said," he quietly added, lowering it once more.

In less than half an hour the gallant little craft was clearly recognizable with the naked eye.

"She has escaped—she is coming out to meet us!" cried Dareall, joyfully. "Our month's cruise is up this very day; that explains it."

But both Junk and Flinders shook their heads incredulously.

"Not to my way of meditating, Cap," observed the former. "More like she's been captured by the Britishers, and is the first of the expedition out, after its work of devastation has been accomplished."

"My opinion, too," interposed Flinders.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Dick, all his sailor's

affection reviving for the gallant little craft in which he had first made his mark—his father's craft before him, in the bargain. "The Mist Witch would never be taken!"

"Not with you in command, Cap, and the rest of us on board—granted!" responded Junk. "But don't forget that we left her with old Fishhooks, of the Cove Inn, in charge, and with only old men and boys for the majority of her crew."

"True, true. Still, look!" eagerly; "she is sheeting out directly toward us."

"Y-e-e-e-s!" slowly; and then, after an expectant pause: "But, look again, Cap."

Dareall gave utterance to a mortified exclamation.

The craft had suddenly come about with all her old-time grace and ease, and was now on a due north course, along the surf-fringed strand-line, with the gale on her starboard quarter.

"After her—hunt her down!" roared Dick, in a rage. "Flyer as she is, our privateer is a better one. About with her at least six points, Junk!"

As the larger craft bore away up the coast-line after the smaller one, all doubts as to the changed character of the latter were removed by the sudden flitting of the British ensign from her gaff.

This was followed by a puff of smoke from her stern, the thirty-two from her stern-chaser falling but a little short of her pursuer, though the interval could not have been much less than four miles.

"That old Long Tom!" muttered Dareall, his admiration divided between his peerless new craft and the old. "There's none better nor truer on the coast, not even on the Sea Witch!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

SEA WITCH AND MIST WITCH.

"RIGHT as a trivet, Cap!" cried Salty Junk, who had overheard the muttered words. "And the little Witch herself, God bless her! Even if in British hands, dash my toplights if it won't cut me to the heart to sink her!"

"Sink her?" echoed the young commander, indignantly. "Never! We'll capture her by boarding, but not a bolt from the Sea Witch's guns shall scar the little beauty's hull!"

The privateer was now piling on in full chase, with every stitch she possessed straining and rounding out till the spars bent, for the wind had increased to little short of a hard gale, and the short, chopping white-caps were mounting into the big, gray-toothed combers.

It was like an eagle hunting down a swallow, or an albatross in pursuit of gull.

But, in spite of the swift flight of the lesser Witch, the inimitable swoop of the greater, when as now at her best, began to tell perceptibly in the race.

Still, not a shot was thrown by the latter till less than a mile and a half separated them, and then due care was taken to shoot over rather than into the fugitive.

But the new commander of the latter was evidently of the stubborn and happy-go-lucky sort, though his gunner's marksmanship was such as to excite the contemptuous derision of Flinders in particular.

Puff after puff came from her stern, even with iron reminders of her pursuer's superiority flying over her head, and shot after shot was hurled back, though with but indifferent success, only one out of the score or more so much as grazing the privateer's topmast.

"Oh, hang such shooting!" cried Fog-eye at last, in unmitigated disgust. "It's a pity to see the best brass chaser on the coast mulligrubbed by a slob that couldn't hit the side of a house with a blunderbuss. Why doesn't he load up with powder alone? he can only bark!"

But it was a long chase than had been anticipated, and Dareall was already apprehensive about getting so far away from the inlet.

"Let go at her mainsail, Flinders!" he reluctantly ordered at last. "We can't waste any more time on this sort of thing. Either you or Barbareau can manage it, ever with the high sea that is running, I guess."

But the bow-chaser was the "Barber's" particular pet, and Flinders was very willing—perhaps more than willing, in view of the nature of the target—to give way in his favor.

"I'll manage ze mattair like ze house afire, capitaine," observed the sturdy old Acadian, with his habitual politeness. "Wait, you see!" And he rapidly sighted the bow-gun, with an assistant at his elbow. "Ze gun of brass is a good gun, and ze ball of iron is a good ball!"

He was a rare gunner, was old Barbareau. Indeed, even Flinders, who was without a peer, especially in hazy weather, was suspected of treasuring a secret jealousy of him on this account.

His first shot now was in keeping with his reputation.

It bored a big round hole plump in the center of the fugitive's straining fore-and-aft mainsail, which was at once perceived to slacken a little in consequence of the gale finding a partial vent through the aperture.

His next one was still better.

It made another hole directly below the first, and with such a narrow space of canvas be-

tween the two that it quickly tore out, after which it rapidly widened until there was a tattered split in the snowy field that a coach and pair could have driven through.

The great sail was seen at once to flap with comparative uselessness, and the speed of the fugitive to fall off fully one-half.

Even at the distance of a short mile, it was tremendous marksmanship, with the sea that was on, and proof no less of the skill of the sighter than of the perfection of the gun.

Dareall smilingly laid his hand on the old Frenchman's shoulder, while the crew burst into a congratulatory cheer in which Flinders generously joined, though with the muttered reservation that it was "pretty blamed good shooting, and no mistake—for a fair-weather Frenchman!"

"That will do, monsieur," said the young commander. "We have her about as we want her now, and you are a brick!"

"A brick, *capitaine*?" modestly echoed Barbareau, with a deprecatory shrug of his great shoulders. "Oh, no, not much of ze brick in my hat, monsieur! Ze gun of brass is a good gun, and ze ball of iron is a good ball."

The privateer now swept down upon her clip-winged little foe like an embodied cyclone.

A wild thought had sprung into Dick's head, such as fairly made him catch his breath.

What if Romney and Collingford, after the capture of the *Mist Witch*, had selected her to send off Naomi and Jessie to New York in, by reason of her known qualities as a coast flyer—for that these worthies would pair during the devastating work up in the bay, and then seek to abduct the young ladies in the order named, he had never for a moment had a shadow of a doubt.

A wild thought, soon to be dissipated!

As the privateer overhauled the fugitive—the latter continuing to pop away industriously with this or that gun, though with no sort of success—the crew of tars on deck were seen to be no more than a comparative handful—barely more than enough to work the craft; while the solitary figure on her poop, though tricked out resplendently in broadcloth and gold lace, with a great trumpet under his arm, was a mere boy of fifteen or sixteen, and a rather diminutive boy at that, with laughing blue eyes and a frank, smiling, reckless face.

"Stop your ridiculous shooting!" roared Dick, as the privateer came about at close quarters, her bellying mountains of snowy canvas overshadowing her namesake as a giant snow-covered pine might an insignificant alder-bush; "or we'll blow you out of the water."

Notwithstanding that the space between was no more than a biscuit-toss, the little fellow pompously elevated his immense trumpet to his mouth with both hands to make his response.

"Blow and be blowed yourself!" he yelled. "I'll fight the ship while there's hair on my hide, or hide on my bones!"

There was a roar of laughter from the privateer, while even the British tars looked up with a grin as if they, too, thought it the best sort of a sea-joke.

"Mutiny, by God!" hallooed the little fellow, dashing among the latter and striking right and left with his trumpet, though inflicting no damage to speak of. "There's got to be respectfulness to the commander of this ship, or there's got to be blood!"

Then he hopped back to the poop, and looked up to the fringe of heads and grinning faces along the privateer's overhanging gunwale with a frank, boyish laugh.

"I will stop firing at you, though," he said. "For it stands to reason that I can't sight guns and do quarter-deck duty at the same time, doesn't it?"

"What?" cried Dick: "was it to your gunnery-ship that we owe our recent peril?"

"Yes, sir."

"And who are you, my little man?"

"Midshipman Jack Grantby, of the British frigate *Tamerlane*, but just now in sole command of this taut little prize."

"Have you any ladies aboard?"

"Not a petticoat, God bless 'em!"

Dareall's transient hope was thus at an end.

"Well, you're a prize to the American privateer *Sea Witch*. Pull down your flag, or we'll do it for you."

"Never, by Jingo!" and dropping his trumpet, Midshipman Jack Grantby whipped out his sword with a great flourish. "True Britons!" he roared, "all hands to the front to resist boarders."

But his true Britons continued to grin, and resistance was not to be thought of on the part of such a handful.

Fifty men poured over the deck from the privateer, and the recapture of the *Mist Witch* was a thing accomplished.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FACE AT THE TAFFRAIL.

"Sir," gravely observed the little midshipman, when offering to yield up his sword to Dick a few minutes later, "it cuts me to the heart to have to surrender to a blasted Yankee privateer, but I needs must bow to superior force."

"Oh, keep your toasting-fork, Jack," was the

smiling reply. "I only want the *Mist Witch* here, and not yourself, nor your men, either, particularly."

"Come, now, Captain Dareall, you are not half a bad fellow. Here's a pointer for you. There are prisoners in the hold."

On the hatch being torn open, the entire American crew of the *Mist Witch*, with old Fishhooks at their head, came tumbling up, and the reunion was complete.

Ten minutes later the little craft was retracing her course under her greater namesake's wing, while half a dozen men were at work slapping a patch upon her mainsail.

Twenty-five miles had been lost by the recapture, but there were no signs of any vessel having come out of the bay when the inlet was again sighted.

The gale was still holding off a bit, though it was blowing hard.

From the midshipman, who proved communicative and jolly enough when placed behind a stiff glass of grog at the privateer's cabin table, it was learned that the expedition of reprisal consisted of but one vessel other than the frigate he had named—a fifty-gunner, with five hundred men, enough in all conscience to finish the nefarious business unaided, one would have thought, though the Britishers were taking no chances where Barnegat Bay was concerned.

This was the small armed brig *Pugilist*; and it had been expected that the expedition would be joined by a "loyal" gentleman's pleasure-yacht.

The *Mist Witch* had been captured down the bay, so that Grantby could not say of his own knowledge what had happened further up the bay, though he had no doubt that Tom's River had been burned.

Dareall brought his fist down on the table with a bang, while he exchanged a stern look with Flinders, who was present.

"Collingford's sloop-yacht *Curlew*, as a matter of course!" he exclaimed.

The mate only nodded.

Here there was heard the ringing announcement of "Sail ho!" from aloft, and the trio hurried upon deck.

A graceful sloop had just made her appearance in the open around the point of Island Beach, two or three miles away.

Nor was this all, or all might have been well enough.

Dimly visible in the lowering air across the narrow sandy barrier, was seen a great battleship, followed by a small brig, coming slowly and cautiously down the bay, as was necessitated by the intricate deep-water line and tortuous currents.

It was the frigate, with her tender, retracing her devastating course, like a destroying monster of fable, gorged with slaughter and rapine.

Dareall pointed to the yacht, with compressed lips, and at once gave the order for her individual pursuit.

"If the ladies have been captured," he said to Flinders, in a low, hoarse voice, "they are doubtless yonder. The *Curlew* is known as a flyer, and better accommodations could be afforded them there than on the frigate."

Then he clinched his hands, addressing to himself:

"Oh, if we may but capture her, with the Tory scoundrel himself on board!"

The sloop had some trouble in rounding the point, and the great schooner, followed by her namesake, came down on her with a rush, but not daring to fire a shot into her, for fear of injury to the young women who might be captives aboard.

In a short time all doubt was put to rest on this point.

When within half a mile of the yacht, and the latter at last sheeting well out for the open against the wind, a pale face was lifted from over the yacht's taffrail and turned toward the schooner.

It was Jessie's!

Then her whole figure was visible, and she sadly waved her hand, after which she was joined by another graceful figure, which was as evidently that of Naomi Goldheart.

Dareall was pale to the lips.

As the figures disappeared, Flinders's heavy hand was laid on his shoulder.

"We'll have 'em, Cap!" muttered the mate, whose suppressed excitement was no less noticeable. "We'll have 'em back out of that, or we'll die together!"

"We will!" was the low response; and their hands met in a hard, wringing grip.

But it was not to be—not then, at least.

Immediately upon getting out of the inlet the yacht had suddenly borne away on a southerly course, directly along the breaker-fringed line of Long Beach.

The privateer, also well in-shore, was sheeting after her, with the mouth of the inlet between, when there was a single shot from within the bay, and some one yelled out:

"Good God! look at the frigate! About ship, or she'll run us down!"

In the excitement of pursuing the yacht the frigate had been temporarily forgotten.

She was now coming out of the inlet, with a grand and majestic rush into the wind—looking

a veritable mountain of up-loomng bows, grinning port-holes, and snowy, giant canvas apparently reaching up to the very clouds.

There was just time to bring the privateer about on her port tack, her companion following her example.

As she luffed, however, she naturally fell off a point or two for the moment.

Then there was the slow, roaring sound of the vast body sweeping through the water close at hand, and the great double-decker was between her and her longed-for prey.

In fact, the battleship towered on high within biscuit-toss.

Then there was a sheet of smoke and flame along the entire double line of port-holes at both main and spar-deck, a hideous, deafening, thunderous roar, and the great ship's entire broadside was delivered.

It passed entirely over the privateer's tops, but every man on her was momentarily stunned or sent reeling by the unexpectedness of the shock, together perhaps with a consciousness of the weight of volleyed-metal hurtling overhead.

At the same time, or an instant later, Romney's voice was heard shouting out from somewhere up in the smoke-enveloped leviathan's stern:

"That will do! She's the best schooner afloat. We must take her alive, together with the pirate scoundrel that commands her!"

Dareall's face slowly darkened, but he turned to the consideration of the schooner's perilous situation, without any other betrayal of the fury that surged in his breast.

"All right, my hearty!" exclaimed Junk, when the necessary orders had been transmitted, and he grasped the young commander's hand. "We're not dead yet, and the *Sea Witch* was born to good luck."

Certainly an extra amount of good luck was beginning to befriend her from this point.

Under excellent management, and before the smoke of the broadside had cleared away, she had sheered out from under the frigate's lee, and was up and away in the teeth of the wind like a phantom—the *Mist Witch* still keeping with her, as a matter of course.

The *Tamerlane* only fired one more shot of warning from her bow-gun, and was then in eager pursuit.

But the fugitives were compelled to keep straight out to sea, as their only chance.

Then Dick, as Flinders came up to him, pointed off to the southward, with an inward groan.

The little *Curlew* was by this time far away, and running like a deer.

"Look!" he exclaimed, buskily. "She will escape, and with them on board. It will be all we can do to escape the frigate."

"No great matter!" replied Flinders, cheerfully. "We can send the little *Mist Witch* after the yacht, and as for the frigate, do you chance to notice that the wind is dropping?"

"Yes."

"Well, look there, then!" Flinders pointed along the waters, whence a thick steam was beginning to rise and gather, the air having chilled perceptibly. "And tell me what you think of that?"

"It is the fog!" cried Dareall, with sudden energy.

"Ay; it will be a thick one, and one of our old opportunities over again. Man alive!" and Flinders slapped the other on the back; "do you forget that I am called Fog-eye and what the nickname signifies?"

"By Jupiter! you are right, old man!" exclaimed Dick, exultantly. "Signal Fishhooks to start after the yacht at once. Of course the little *Mist Witch* would be of little use to us here without you aboard of her, and she may run down the yacht. As you say, it may be the opportunity of our lives with the frigate; and there comes the armed brig out of the inlet in her wake!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE FOG FIEND.

FULL instructions were at once conveyed to the old sailor innkeeper commanding the *Mist Witch*, which bore away to the southward in pursuit of the *Curlew* with scarcely any delay.

The fog was already thickening as the wind lulled, the *Tamerlane* being at this time less than a mile back in the direction of the inlet mouth, while the *Pugilist* was a mile or two in the rear of her.

She evidently began to appreciate the seriousness of her position, which was critical enough, should it set on to blow hard in from the south-east again, with the fog rapidly closing her in its milky embrace and the breakers of the sandy beach-ships less than two miles away on her lee, while, of course, the situation of the brig was even yet more critical.

In fact, as the frigate came on, she began to fire after the schooner with every gun she could bring to bear, and now with the evident purpose of disabling or sinking her at the earliest possible moment.

But the privateer was at best an uncertain mark, and as the mist deepened she was unable to shift her position at leisure without being

detected at all, so that the Tamerlane's foolish firing was presently relinquished.

Dick and his two mates were in consultation on their poop-deck prior to taking aggressive measures, while the schooner was making a slow circuit to the north of the spot where the frigate and her companion were groping cautiously out, doubtless preparatory to coming to a more or less complete standstill in sheer self-defense.

"We'll have them just where we had the Hector!" exclaimed Dick, rubbing his hands. "By Jupiter! it would be a reprisal on our side with a vengeance, if we could but destroy them both."

"Wilder things than that might happen, Cap," suggested Flinders. "For, if the frigate alone is six times the strength that we overcame in the Hector—with the help of the fog, God bless it!—our big Witch here is as many times more powerful than her namesake."

"True; but we mustn't forget the armed brig back in yonder."

"I'm not forgetting her, Cap, nor the Frying Pans, either, which either one of 'em may chance to blunder onto in this devil's mist."

"Ah, if that might only be!"

The Frying Pans were particularly dangerous sunken reefs about a mile outside the inlet, on a line with the point of Island Beach, and, though better known, were scarcely less perilous than the quicksands of the Gridiron, or any of the numerous shoals and sunken reefs of the inner bay.

They were definitely located by coast survey and subsequently removed early in the present century.

"While we're a-deliberatin'," interposed the first mate at this juncture, "I've a suggestion and a propersition to make as might be of some account."

"All your propositions are of some account, Salty," said Dick. "What is this one?"

"In the fu'st place, I purdict that when this fog lifts, the gale will bu'st out again from the sou'-sou'-east, an' be a reg'lar snorter."

"Very likely."

"In the next place, I purdict that, if we give the frigate and her brig a good hammerin' before it lifts, especially about the upper works, an' they manage to miss the Frying Pans, that they'll take to the inside of the bay for shelter and repairs."

"Well?"

"And, in the last place, if they should, it would be a blessed good thing for us to bear off to south'ard, enter the lower bay by Old Inlet, then sneak up on 'em from the south, an' let 'em have pertickular thunder!"

"A good idea!" commented Dick. "But that's looking a long way ahead, and taking a good many agreeable things for granted."

But Flinders agreed with Junk in the strong possibility of such a thing; and the consequence was that they all set to work at the business in hand in decidedly hopeful spirits.

The fog had by this time become all but impenetrable to the ordinary eye, not a suggestion of the exact position of either frigate or brig being observable.

But Fog-eye Flinders took his stand by the man at the wheel, his strange eyes fixed dreamily forward, and the privateer was guided unquestioningly by his directions.

In the mean time, the utmost silence that was possible was commanded on board.

At last he signed to the helmsman, and the schooner was brought about.

Then Fog-eye ran amidships, where the men were standing or moving about in shadowy outline, and himself, with Barbareau's and other assistance, attended to the sighting of the port broadside.

There was a simultaneous flash, a single booming, echoing report, and the shots of the three guns were delivered as one into what appeared the yielding bosom of the fog-bank.

After a satisfied gaze outward, he turned with a smile to Dareall, Junk, and the two surgeons, who had curiously followed his every movement.

"Less than two cable-lengths, and every shot into the step of the frigate's mainmast," he calmly announced. "A thirty-two now in the same place will do the business for that spar. Cap, round her out, if you please."

In the mean time, there had ensued a great uproar somewhere in the mist near at hand, indicating a confusion on the frigate's deck.

Then came the answering crash of her tremendous broadside, twenty-four guns in all, but as its only mark was the shot in the mist in which the ghostly flash of the privateer's delivery had been perceived, and which she no longer occupied, of course it was without effect.

"Let 'em pave the bottom of the sea with iron cobble-stones, if they want to," was Fog-eye's imperturbable comment, as he returned to his position at the privateer's stern. "We can stand it if they can."

Here, as the craft rounded out, he studied the mist carefully in the one important direction, after which, sighting the stern chaser with extra care, he touched it off with his own hand.

"It's a goner!" he exclaimed, in a low voice, while rising from the gun with an exultant smile. "Wait!"

The crash of the bolt had been distinctly heard, and now, scarcely had the fog-echo of the report died away before it was followed by a great rending, tearing and splashing sound, accompanied by a chorus of oaths, curses and yells.

"It's down!" he cried, still in his guarded voice, while peering through the mist. "It's down—her mainmast close by the board!"

The crew of the privateer would have burst into a cheer but for the injunction to silence that had been given; but their excitement was no less noticeable—as far as anything could be noticeable in the mist—than that of the officers.

On Flinders's advice the privateer now began what had been the favorite fog tactics of the little Mist Witch, which was to circle around her mist-shrouded victim at short range, and let fly with this or that gun or broadside at discretion.

This was continued until the frigate's foremast was also announced to have gone by the board.

"Curse you for cowardly, mist-groping hounds!" roared Romney's voice from where the frigate's high poop-deck should be; "can't you come in closer or wait till the mist lifts, and give us a show?"

"Yes, we can," observed Flinders, smiling, "but we sha'n't."

And his next shot, which chanced to be with the bow-chaser, with old Barbareau among the others at his elbow, was sighted with especial care.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A TERRIBLE REPRISAL.

AFTER firing the piece, Flinders stared into the fog along the muzzle of the gun, and then drew himself up with a disappointed expression.

"I missed him!" he exclaimed, in a regretful tone.

"Him?" cried Dareall, interrogatively.

"Yes, Cap," quietly. "I aimed to cut Mr. Romney in two with a round shot, but only killed two other officers near him and the man at the wheel."

Barbareau raised his hands with an expression of absolute amazement.

"Mon Dieu!" he exclaimed; "ze man zat can bring down men wiz ze cannon-ball, like ze birds wiz ze shotgun, and ze fog so thick zat dere is no man at all, is a meeracle!"

"I wouldn't bother about any individual man at present, Flinders—not even Romney," advised Dareall. "Night is coming on, and if you can knock the other mast out of her, we can safely leave her to her fate for the time being, while we look after the brig."

"All right, Cap."

And the circling, deadly, fog-muffled work was continued.

Romney and his officers were by this time at their wits' ends, as may well be imagined.

If the former, in the case of the Hector, had found his previous antagonist a veritable witch of the mists, he could but now think that he was being tackled by the fog-fiend himself.

Added to this, the superstitions of the numerous crew of the frigate began to grow excited, and murmurs of discontent were heard on every side.

At last, when the mizzen-mast also went by the board, leaving the frigate thoroughly dismantled, these murmurs grew into something little short of actual mutiny.

But now the firing from the concealed foe seemed to be directed against some distant object. At all events, the explosions and phantom-like flashes were further away, and the heretofore unerring bolts were no longer felt on board the frigate.

"She must be at the brig," suggested the first lieutenant of the Tamerlane, in a tone of awe; in fact, this sort of tone, or one of exasperation, was by this time quite the order of the day on the unfortunate double-decker.

"Very likely," growled Romney, who was a post-captain now. "Wait!" He looked around into the mist, and then held up his hand. "The gale is coming on again!" he exclaimed, in suppressed excitement. "This infernal fog should not last if it comes on to blow hard."

"But there are breakers on our lee," observed Mr. Wallerton, the first lieutenant.

"I know that. Still, if we could rig up a jury-mast, as of course we can, there might be comparative safety in it, as compared with this accursed fog."

"May I ask what you would do, sir?"

"Certainly; run the ship back through the inlet, and seek protection behind one of the islands and beach points. We could then make more thorough repairs at leisure, besides guarding the inlet itself against the entrance of the privateer. But look here; we must hold a general council on this point."

The council, which was held with the three lieutenants, was of necessity a hurried one, for the wind was already freshening freely from seaward, and the fog beginning to dissipate.

The captain's original proposition was at once agreed on.

The wreck of the masts had already been cleared away, and now the work of setting up a jury-mast on the stump of the mainmast was set about with the utmost dispatch.

With excellent ship-carpenters on hand, and such a multitudinous crew from which to select laborers and assistants, it was a short work for the rough, transient job that was in contemplation.

By a little before nightfall, and before the danger of the frigate was greatly aggravated, though it was by this time blowing hard, the temporary jury-mast was erected, and enough canvas bent upon it to give her sailing and steerage way.

And the fog, which had been so fatal to the proud battle-ship, had by this time wholly disappeared, together with the mysterious enemy that had wrought so mischievously under its concealing cloak.

In other words, as the hulk slowly got under way, heading back for the inlet-mouth, not a vestige of the Sea Witch could be seen, and it was hours now since the booming of her deadly shots had been heard.

Suddenly Mr. Wallerton, who was sweeping the sandy coast-line with his glass, exclaimed:

"But there's the Pugilist at last! And, by heavens! she's on the Frying Pans, and bumping her bottom out in the bargain."

The other glasses were at once directed thitherward, and his announcement confirmed.

There was hardly an officer on board that had not heard more or less definitely of the deadly Frying Pans thereabouts (every stormy coast has its Frying Pans, for that matter, or some dangerous spot analogously named), though it chanced that the first lieutenant was the only one who had had any personal experience with these particular reefs.

"Yes," growled Romney, lowering his glass with an oath, "and the infernal privateer has knocked the sticks out of her to boot! As if they couldn't have left it to the reefs themselves to finish the poor brig!"

He strode off to the further side of the poop, and began to pace the deck with a perturbation of spirits which his subordinates could readily appreciate.

In spite of his bad luck with the Hector, George Romney had secured the command of this important expedition through the strong personal friendship of Admiral Lord Howe, then in command of the British naval forces on the coast, with headquarters at New York; and just before securing it he had received his commission promoting him to a post-captaincy from the Admiralty Board, less by reason of his deserts than through the influence of powerful aristocratic connections, as was then even more the case than latterly in both branches of the British service.

It had been a proud day for him, the concurrence of these two important events in his career, so sharply on the heels of his bitter humiliation in the loss of the Hector (to say nothing of the Cormorant) and his escape from his captivity in Philadelphia—and now!

He ground his heel on the deck, and silently raged in the bitterness of his fury and despair.

But Romney was a man of no mean qualities of energy and self-control in grievous emergencies, and when the frigate was at last within hail of her even more unfortunate associate craft, he was at least outwardly calm and self-reliant.

The brig was in a truly desperate condition, fast pounding her bottom out against the submerged rocks in which she was hopelessly wedged, thoroughly dismantled by the privateer's cannon-balls, and with anxious and worn-begone faces everywhere visible, though some of the men were at work on something amidships.

"Take to your boats!" and reach the beach yonder!" shouted Romney, after the preliminary hails had been exchanged.

"Haven't got any boats," was the laconic response from the lieutenant in command of the wreck. "All smashed by that cursed privateer!"

"Make a raft then!"

"That's just what we're doing."

"What became of the privateer?"

"Gone off southward."

A gleam of hope relieved the brooding exasperation of Captain Romney's face.

If he could not have anything but defeat and humiliation in his profession, he thought, he could at least have Naomi Goldheart.

He was somewhat oblivious, however, of the circumstances under which she had again been induced to quit her home, or the house she was making her home.

In brief, they were these: At the first attack on Tom's River, Jessie Dearborn had been seized by Squire Collingford, or at his orders, and forcibly conveyed on board his yacht. Then, and with the town already fired, Romney had sought Naomi, and only prevailed on her to accompany her captive cousin with Collingford on the Curlew on condition of his sparing the Dearborn homestead, together with several others she had pleaded for, including the Widow Dareall's cottage. This last concession he had given in to with the utmost reluctance, but she

had remained obdurate, and had gained her point.

Now he failed to see how this sort of unmanly compulsion must have lowered him in the estimation of the beautiful and spirited girl he loved; and remembering only the original fascination, was cheating himself with the thought that she still loved and respected him as at first.

"Good!" he exclaimed: "the cursed privateer has doubtless gone in chase of Collingford's yacht. But the sloop is also a flyer, and with her long start of so many hours, she cannot possibly be overtaken this side of Savannah."

And then an ameliorating vision rose before him of his somehow getting out of his present humiliating situation and proceeding to Savannah (newly passed into British control and destined to remain so to the end of the war), on furlough, there to marry the being of his adoration, with the long honeymoon of rapture that must follow.

But a rude suggestion on the part of one of his officers somewhat disturbed his golden dreams.

"But we mustn't forget, sir," said the officer, who was the second lieutenant, "that the little Mist Witch, which her bigger namesake must have run down, up the coast a ways, before we came out of the bay, was doubtless on the heels of the Curlew soon after the mist began to gather. At all events, she couldn't have helped the privateer in the fog-firing that so ruined us, and they do say that she is a flyer, too, with scarcely an equal on the coast."

Romney gave him an angry look, and, muttering an unintelligible reply, turned his attention to the business in hand.

The frigate, or rather the bulk of the frigate, managed to enter the inlet just as night closed in, and rounding the northern point of Long Beach, at last secured an anchorage behind a little wooded island to the south of it, where she was tolerably well protected from the gale, which was now bursting out afresh in all its fury.

A little later on a series of driftwood fires were observed dotting the low-lying barrier beach, as an indication that the people of the wrecked brig had at last succeeded in making a landing with their raft, and were making the best of their precarious situation.

"So far, so good!" exclaimed Romney. "We hold the inlet entrance under our broadside. There can be no other. And here we can remain undisturbed until more substantial repairs shall enable us to put to sea."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE PRIVATEER'S REVENGE.

BUT many British naval officers, of higher standing than Captain Romney of the Tamerlane, were strangely ignorant of the configuration of our coast in its minor points during the Revolutionary War.

And scarcely ever did any one of them fall into a more ignorant error than did that officer on this momentous occasion.

There was and is another approach to Barnegat Inlet, though much more seldom used by reason of its intricate character.

A glance at any good coast chart will set the matter to rest.

This other approach was by way of Old Inlet, at the extreme end of Long Beach, thirty miles to the south, and of Little Egg Harbor, whence the intervening water-strip stretches northward into Barnegat Bay proper. But it is of varying width, very irregular in form, and so thickly studded with islets and shoals as to be seldom attempted by vessels of the privateer's tonnage.

But the route was thoroughly familiar to Dareall and his two mates, no less than to many a hardy fisherman and coastman composing their ship's company.

And it was to essay this difficult and roundabout entrance that the Sea Witch had been put upon her southerly course, after peppering the stranded brig to her heart's content, as the fog began to disappear with the return of the storm.

It was a longer trip than would otherwise have been, by reason of the violence of the gale compelling her to keep well out from the coast-line.

As it was, she hugged it closely enough for her inmates to plainly hear the pounding of the mad surf upon the beach above the howling of the storm, though it was only her magnificent sailing and sea-boat qualities that enabled her to do this with any degree of safety.

Though the wind was so violent, the heavens had cleared considerably.

It was only, however, when the moon rose, at about midnight, that the privateer found herself off Old Inlet, and began to feel her way in with the utmost caution, under nothing but mizzen-spanker, but so far all snug afloat and aloft.

At this juncture the lookout reported a sail to the south on her port bow.

The moon was rushing like a mad thing among the hurrying scud, but her light was brilliant and uninterrupted at intervals.

The sail reported was presently discernible from the deck, as that of a comparatively small craft, gallantly making for the north across the entrance into Great Bay, that entrance being nothing more than the southern section of Old Inlet itself.

"It's the Mist Witch," was Flinders's announcement, after a brief examination with his night-glass.

There was no longer any thought of questioning his judgment as a lookout. But Dick Dareall felt a keen sense of disappointment on this occasion, inasmuch as so speedy a return of the little schooner from her chase was evidence enough that it had been unsuccessful.

The latter was speedily within hail, the vessels coming as close together as they dared in the heavy seas that were on.

The Mist Witch was also solely under her spanker, and, in explanation of his failure to overtake the sloop, old Hooks at first pointed to her mainsail, which, though clewed in, gave evidence of its having been torn into tatters.

His fuller explanation was to the effect that the chase had been kept up until the second outburst of the gale—the fog having failed to extend far southward—and the little Witch was slowly overhauling the yacht, when the patch in the mainsail suddenly gave way, the entire canvas going into rags, when the pursuit was necessarily abandoned as hopeless.

Hooks now received his instructions to follow the privateer into the inlet, and the vessels were about to temporarily part company for the privateer to lead the way when a sturdy, boyish voice called out from the lesser craft:

"I say, Mister Privateersman!"

"Hallo!" responded Dareall, recognizing Mr. Midshipman Grantby in the hailer.

"Blast a little craft, when you're not in command of her!" cried the little fellow. "Let me come aboard of your ship, won't you? She looks like such a beauty that I'd like to tread her deck at your side."

Dick laughed, as did some others, for all had taken a liking to the pretentious but gallant little middy, in spite of his being a Britisher.

"Nonsense, my little man!" he replied. "How could you come? A boat would never live in this sea."

But Jack Grantby was already on the Mist Witch's rail, holding onto the fore-ratlines with one hand.

"Will you take me on board if I come?" he shouted.

"But you can't come!"

"I ask you will you take me?"

"Yes," with a laugh.

The little fellow tore off his jacket, cast it behind him, and plunged head-foremost into the boiling sea.

A cry of solicitude rose from both crafts, but, by almost incredible good luck, the rising wave into which he had plunged rolled him up on its giant crest like a ball, and the next moment carried him with a grand sweep directly under the privateer's quarter, whence old Salty Junk, hanging to the rail with one hand and reaching far over and down with the other, plucked him up and across the guard by the hair of the head.

"Thank you, my friend!" said the little midshipman, in quite a matter-of-fact tone, though sputtering and blowing a bit, as was no more than natural. "You're very kind."

Then he shook himself like a dog, and going up to Dareall, took his hand with a frank look of liking on his fresh, clear face.

"I say, Captain Dareall," he remarked, looking up into the other's eyes, "I'm mighty glad you agreed to take me on. But it's a blasted shame that I lost my hat, isn't it?"

By a sort of impulse, the entire crews of both crafts burst into a ringing cheer.

It was deserving of it as a deed of exceptional hardihood, and all the more so from the unaffected indifference with which it had been accomplished.

"And I say that you are a perfect little trump!" exclaimed Dareall, pressing the sturdy little hand that had been so confidently thrust into his. "It's a pity you're not an American, my boy."

"But I'm half an American as it is, Captain," was the ingenuous response. "For, though my dad is Sir Lionel Grantby, of Grantby Grange, in Wiltshire, my mother was a lady from your Boston town—though she's dead these three years, God bless her!" with a fleeting emotion.

"Why not a whole American, then?" demanded the young commander. "How would you like to be one of us, Mister Jack?"

But the little fellow was at once upon his dignity, drawing himself up to his full height (what there was of it), though without withdrawing his hand.

"Come now, none of that, or you and I shall quarrel, old chap!" he exclaimed, adding in his more juvenile tone: "You see, I like you as good as nuts, captain, but a Grantby never deserts his colors in war-time."

"Good for you!" cried Dick.

And the subject was dropped, never to be resumed; while the little middy stuck to his protector's side as the inlet was entered, and the difficult passage begun.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AT THE ENEMY'S REAR.

ONCE into the intricate channel between the island beaches and the mainland, after crossing the inner mouth of Little Egg Harbor, the two vessels were comparatively sheltered from the violence of the gale, though the passage northward in among the shoals and islets of the narrow sound was of necessity a slow and tedious one.

The little midshipman, on being informed of the treatment that had been meted out to the frigate and brig, was at first very grave.

"I'm mighty cut up on the ship's account," he observed, "though I don't care how Captain Romney may feel over it. He's an upstart, and in his present position over the heads of many a better, older and more deserving officer."

Then, after a long pause, he looked around him, surveying the schooner's perfect proportions with staring eyes, and exclaimed:

"Good God, Cap! what a stunner of a privateer you've got, anyway! A mere schooner like this, big as she is, to knock the top works of one of the best of the king's double-deckers into a cocked hat, fog or no fog, to say nothing of the armed brig! Why, I don't believe we'll ever thrash you Americans into submission at all."

"We don't mean that you shall, my lad," was the quiet reply.

It was the gray of morning before the tortuous sound-passage was drawn to a close, with the great bulk of the frigate's hull dimly outlined against the islet behind which she had made her anchorage.

Torches and lanterns were flashing to and fro upon her decks, and this, together with a great hammering and pounding that could be heard going on aboard, indicated that the work of stepping in regular and substantial jury-masts was still in progress, after doubtless lasting through the night.

That she was likewise wholly unsuspecting of any new danger threatening was equally apparent.

"It must have been a sort of revelation to me," observed Dareall to his two mates, with whom he was now in consultation, "that the big fellow would come in here for refuge. We've got her just where we want her."

The moon was still shining occasionally, though at less frequent intervals than before, and the morning was coming on, brooding and dismal, while the violence of the wind and sea outside of the beach-line gave no signs of abatement.

The schooner, though, with more than her spanker set now and in readiness to sail forward at an instant's notice, had come to a temporary anchorage at the east of an islet whose rising ground effectually shadowed her presence about half a mile from the frigate, while the Mist Witch had imitated her example, and was lying abreast of her, half a cable's length away.

It was necessary to take time by the forelock before the day should so brighten as to betray their presence and object to the enemy, which, despite its dismantled condition, was still possessed of its tremendous broadsides and its five hundred brave British tars intact.

But Dick Dareall had already formulated and digested his plans in the prospective.

After a brief consultation between the two vessels—the two Witches, big and little—a small boat silently shot out from the side of the latter with muffled oars.

Propelled by four men, with a fifth at the bow, the little boat carried at the end of a stout pole projecting forward a huge double-pannier-shaped object, looking very like the two-fold balancing burdens prepared for the back of a mountain pack-mule.

This object consisted of four equally distributed kegs of gunpowder, sewn into its shape with stout canvas provided with iron hooks for making fast.

With the exception of the former similar essay in the case of the Jezebel on the Gridiron Shoals, it was one of the few torpedo experiments of the war.

It was thus left to the young commander of the privateer, until but a short time previous a comparatively inexperienced and obscure individual, to initiate a species of armament that has since become such an important factor in naval warfare, enlisting the brains and inventive genius of the best and most subtle engineering talent of the world.

As the little boat sped out and on upon its silent and deadly mission, the occupants of both attacking vessels, which lay in readiness to slip their cables and sheet out forward at an instant's signal, waited in hushed and grim expectancy.

The great armed hulk lay stern on. The little boat covered the water-space and glided under the shadow cast by her overhang like but another shadow.

Her burden was made fast deep in and well under her stern-post, and the little boat retreated as silently as she had advanced.

There was left behind in the deep shadow a spark, like a glow-worm, on the water, which seemed to creep slowly and steadily still deeper back under the hulk's counter.

Then the man in the bow of the little boat.

now well away on the return, while crossing a momentary sheet of moonlight spread out over the tossing water, waved his hand thrice.

The anchor cables were severed in response, as with the single blow of an ax, and both privateer and little schooner, catching the storm wind from across the island beach upon their spanker and jib sails, rushed forward with the impetus of hounds unleashed upon their prey.

Then there was an enormous, blinding flash, a deafening, reverberating roar, and after being fairly lifted out of the water at one end, the great armed and peopled hulk settled back with two-thirds of her stern torn out, her timbers on fire, and the sea-water rushing like a cataract into the gaping breach.

There was enough daylight afforded by this time to perceive that the surprise of the enemy had been no less disastrous than complete, the majority of the throngs upon her decks seeming to have been violently prostrated by the shock.

There was a ringing cheer, and the two Witches swooped up, one on either side of the hulk, while the frigate's decks were instantly swept with a deluge of cannister and grape.

The castaways of the Pugilist were at this juncture first perceived by the Americans.

They were gathered along the island sands, a woe-begone crowd, gazing in stupefied wonder at the yet more serious calamity, that had thus fallen like a thunderbolt upon their associates of the frigate, than had been their own portion of defeat and despair.

As the Sea Witch rounded out from under the frigate's bows, Flinders let go with her stern gun, the iron sphere upsetting and shattering her bow-chaser, thus leaving her with nothing but her broadsides, whose range could be easily avoided.

But the hulk was already fast settling in deep water by the stern.

All idea of fighting had been knocked out of her men for the time being, the organized industry which had been expended on the construction of jury-spars being now diverted to the hasty fabrication of a life-raft, and to getting in readiness such boats as had not been shaken into uselessness by the explosion.

But at least a fourth of the frigate's ship's company had apparently been killed, disabled or incapacitated by that and the raking fire of case-shot following it.

"Captain Romney!" thundered out Dareall, from the poop of his privateer.

In response, Romney, pale as death, stepped into view from among his officers on the wreck's quarter-deck, but without speaking a reply.

"Are you still rejoicing over your cowardly devastation of Barnegat Bay shore?" was shouted again, in bitter sarcasm.

He still made no reply, but rather tottered than stepped back to rejoin his associates.

In fact, the man looked as if he were completely crushed, or rendered temporarily imbecile.

Even Flinders, who, with raging jealousy in his heart, had drawn a deadly bead upon him with his pistol, could not bring himself to fire the shot, but simply thrust the weapon back in his belt, while muttering something behind his lips.

"Poor Captain Romney!" exclaimed little Jack Granby, who had been signaling to some of his fellow-midshipmen from his place at Dick's side; "I wouldn't suffer what he suffers for a hundred thousand pounds. But even big-bug influence will scarcely be sufficient now to make him a rear-admiral over better men's heads, I fancy."

Dareall might easily have destroyed the wreck's people at his leisure now.

But the reprisal was already complete, Tom's River avenged, the prospective prisoners would doubtless "keep" on the adjacent sands till wanted, and he was, moreover, anxious to get home after his astounding month's cruise.

So he humanely abstained from following up an advantage, which would have been little less than an indiscriminate and unresisted slaughter, and continued on up the bay, after leaving the Mist Witch behind to keep guard over the castaways.

He had reason, however, to half regret his mercy on the way up the bay, the evidences of the expedition's devastating hand, in the shape of burned farm-houses, pillaged hamlets and ruined harvests, were so staringly apparent on every hand.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AFTER THE BATTLE.

TOM'S RIVER was found, however, to have been only half-destroyed, the invaders having quitted the place in such haste after the application of the incendiary torch that the inhabitants had been enabled to extinguish the advancing flames.

The neighboring hamlets of Silverton and Osbornville, a little further up the bay, had, however, been completely burned.

A similar fate had overtaken Wareton, midway down to the inlet; and indeed, there was scarcely a habitation within a mile of the sea-line for the entire length of the bay-shore that

had not felt the rushing impress of the destroying hand.

Collingford Hall remained intact on its prominent rise of ground, as a matter of course, while, as before stated, the Dearborn homestead and Dick's mother's cottage were among the domiciles that had been spared.

Sedley and his militia-men had made a gallant resistance against overwhelming odds, after which some of them had fled, while the remainder, including the brave captain himself, had stood their ground and been killed to a man.

But the privateer was just coming to her moorings at the little dock, where a throng of the unfortunate townspeople were cheering her arrival, when some one cried out that smoke was rising from the roof of the great house on the hill.

So it was, and a few minutes later Collingford Hall was seen to be in flames.

"Just my 'tarnation luck!" roared Boatswain Jerry Wardlow, stamping on the deck. "I'd have come into the property on Hank Collingford's death—which can't be long delayed, while hemp grows and rope is twisted—and there goes the handsomest part of it up in smoke and flame! It's an infernal, blasted shame! for I ain't a Tory, if the 'Squire is!'"

His indignation was modified a little later, however, by a cheering fact that was made apparent to him as the Witch swung in.

This was that the Red Lion Tavern was among the buildings still standing among its charred and blackened neighbors, together with certain loving signals from some of his whilom boon companions on the dock.

As Dareall stepped ashore, a company of Continentals was filing down the street to greet the privateer's return, and then his hand was unexpectedly grasped by Captain Herbert Goldheart, of the Jersey Blues.

He was there on detached duty, the news of the expedition's work having reached Washington's army, or a small part of it on post duty at Freehold, the previous day.

Captain Goldheart, furthermore, informed the young commander, that Collingford Hall had been fired in a fit of exasperation by a crowd of country boys, and that he had reached the scene with his men too late to prevent its destruction.

Of his sister's second disappearance he said little or nothing, though evidently aware of the extenuating circumstances accompanying it, but he was earnest in his sympathy with Dick over Jessie's capture, and quite sure she would speedily be set at liberty.

"She will be that," exclaimed Dareall, his face darkening, "if I have to sail the Sea Witch up the Savannah River, and fight the whole British fleet to bring it about!"

"What! are they off for Savannah, then?" cried Goldheart.

Dick replied in the affirmative, and then gave him a hurried account of his tremendous successes at the mouth of the bay, together with a brief resumé of his cruise.

Dick then hurried away, and a few minutes later his dear mother was sobbing out her thankfulness for his safe return upon his breast.

From the widow's cottage he hastened, with such news as he had of the absent young ladies, to the Dearborn homestead.

The widow had by this time somewhat mastered her grief over the bereavement, chiefly, it seemed, through her knowledge of and firm faith in Jessie's force of character.

"That purblind fool, Henry Collingford!" she exclaimed, indignantly: "to think that he might obtain by compulsion the hand of a young woman like my daughter, when she has expressed her dislike for him again and again! But he'll speedily find out his mistake."

Dick, in his forlornness, felt considerably comforted by this manner of the widow's viewing the matter.

"Yes," he muttered, "he will find out his mistake, my friend, but not altogether at your daughter's hands. I will attend to that!"

As for Mrs. Goldheart, time had not modified nor fresh humiliation withered her supreme self-sufficiency and pride.

"Naomi could not but accompany her cousin, in common humanity of kinship," she averred. "Besides, she saved the homestead here and your mother's property by doing so. You especially ought to be grateful for that act of leniency, Captain Dareall."

"Oh, yes!" grunted Dick; "I suppose so."

"Besides," continued Mrs. Goldheart, reflectively, and she smoothed out her coquettish little apron and adjusted her cap-ribbons, "Captain Romney is such a perfect gentleman, personally, and it is a great pity he is a Britisher."

Her sister gave her a look.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Dareall. "And I suppose you think he has proved himself such by compelling your daughter to abandon her home by the perfectly gentlemanly means of threatening to burn it up over your heads in the event of her refusal."

"Well, Captain Dareall," hesitated the fair dame, in no little confusion, "you see—you see, it is war-time. And since Naomi's heart is already in Captain Romney's keeping—"

But here was the opportunity for a retort that Dick could not allow to escape.

"Nothing of the sort, by your leave, ma'm!" he blandly interrupted. "If it ever was in the accomplished scoundrel's keeping, it is so no longer. That I know of my own knowledge"—which he didn't, though, by the way, but only by deduction or conjecture. "And if it isn't already in the keeping of another—and he a brave American patriot and sailor, in the bargain—it may be in time; and that other will yet win your fair daughter for himself, besides wreaking a signal vengeance upon her contemptible threatener and abductor!"

Mrs. Goldheart looked up in unaffected surprise, as did her sister likewise, for that matter.

"What are you raving about, sir?" she angrily asked. "My daughter's heart possibly in the keeping of yet another suitor, who has sworn to win her hand?"

"Exactly, ma'm!" cried Dick, fairly delighted at her resentment.

"I demand his name, sir! Who may this presumptuous person be?"

"The brave second mate of the Sea Witch, ma'm—Mr. Hezekiah, otherwise Fog-eye, Flinders."

It chanced that Mrs. Goldheart had met Flinders several times in the past, and she certainly held him in especial abomination as a representative of the commoner working class that she esteemed herself as being separated from by an impassable social gulf.

She uttered a furious scream, and almost went into hysterics, during which the young commander managed to make his escape.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE LITTLE MIST WITCH'S LAST SERVICE.

TO take a brief historical view of the situation, Washington had by this time—late in August—after driving the British into New York City as a result of the battle of Monmouth, formed his line from Morristown, where he now had his temporary headquarters, around the north of the city, so as to be able to interpose between Clinton and Philadelphia or New England, as the case might be.

These positions were destined to be maintained till the beginning of the Yorktown campaign, three years later, in 1781.

Indeed, the British were now turning their aggressive intentions almost wholly to the southward, though Dareall was rejoiced to learn from Captain Goldheart, who was to remain posted with his company of the Blues for some time in the vicinity of Tom's River, that the actual British occupation of Savannah had not yet taken place, but only the mouth of the river, where they were building rude forts to assist the fleet in maintaining its blockade, and in preparation for the expedition of conquest that was to set out from New York Harbor later in the year.

This, of course, presented a more cheering prospect for the recovery of Jessie and her cousin.

On the day following the return of the privateer to Tom's River, whose enterprising inhabitants were already setting about its reconstruction, Dick again set sail down the bay for the purpose of bringing up the castaways of the Tamerlane and the Pugilist from off Long Beach, Captain Goldheart having expedited measures for guarding and caring for them until a final disposition of them should be decided on by the authorities.

But a great and bitter disappointment was in store for the bold privateersmen of the Sea Witch.

On reaching the beach, the weather having meantime cleared, not a Britisher was to be seen, though there were abundant evidences of their recent occupation of the sands, mostly in the shape of a long line of burned-out camp-fires of driftwood, the ashes of some of which were found to be hardly cold.

The shell of the frigate, burned to the water's edge, was visible on the one hand, while there was still something left of the brig on the Flying Pans, the shore for miles being strewn with wreckage from one or the other.

That was all there was in explanation of the mystery at first, until Flinders's keen vision detected something tossing on the waves within a short distance of the wooded little islet connected with the Gridiron Shoals.

It proved to be the Mist Witch, at the end of her valiant though circumscribed career at last, floating bottom up, and with a ragged hole at her starboard water-line through which a file of marines could have marched abreast.

Dareall and his mates were visibly affected at the sight, and there was not a man of the privateer's crew that had formerly sailed in the gallant little craft but was miserable and crest-fallen over this mysterious wind-up of her glorious career.

While they were debating with themselves as to what might have been the fate of her late ship's company, there came a hail from the neighboring islet, and the mystery was explained.

Old Hooks had climbed a tree on an eminence in the middle of it, and was waving his hat enthusiastically.

"We're all here, safe and sound!" he halloed. "Send your boats."

And then his late associates of the little schooner began to make their appearance here and there among the steep rocks and prickly undergrowth that formed the islet's margin.

All were speedily transferred to the privateer, when their story was soon told.

At daybreak of that day, it seemed; a huge British gunboat, conveying two empty transports back to New York from the mouth of the Savannah River, had suddenly made its appearance off the islet, in response to signals of distress from the great throng of castaways along the beach-sands, of course for the purpose of taking them off.

The *Mist Witch*, which was lying to on the lookout not far from the Gridirons, had at once been started out to give battle.

But, alas! her good fairy of the fog was no longer on hand to befriend her. The first shot from the gunboat's big bow-gun had proved a settler. It carried a large shell, which exploded instantly at the point of contact, ripping the breach at the water-line that had been already noted. But, notwithstanding that the sea had begun to enter in a torrent, she had capsized, instead of filling, by reason of her exceptional light draught, combined with the weight of her guns and the extreme height and expanse of her spars and sails.

All her crew had been enabled to reach the islet by swimming. They had not been molested nor further interfered with.

Indeed, the gunboat did not even make the inlet; but the work of transferring the six hundred castaways from the beach to the transports had seemed to be hurried forward with the utmost dispatch, as all were filled with nervous dread lest the *Sea Witch* might put in a reappearance before it could be accomplished; after which all sail had been made to the northward.

Such was the tragic end of the gallant smack, which had formed the foundation of Dick Dareall's nautical fame, no less than that of many of his hardy associates, and which, considering her size, or rather lack of it, had wrought unprecedented destruction among the British coast marine.

It was finally decided to give her a funeral befitting her proud career, inasmuch as it was obvious that she could never be made permanently seaworthy again.

Accordingly the hole in her bottom was first rudely patched over with several thicknesses of oiled canvas.

Then she was righted, pumped out, her guns and small-arms were transferred to her namesake, and her deck cleared as if for action.

Then, the wind having shifted the night before to northwesterly, her wheel was lashed down, her colors nailed to her mainmast, and, headed for the inlet, with all her canvas set, she was intrusted to the god of storms, after several lighted pine-knots had been flung into her cabin saloon.

She kept her lonely way seaward without accident until a mile or two outside the inlet, when the flames began to make their appearance, and, still sailing gallantly, she swept out before the wind, wrapped in wreathing fire and affording a grand and pathetic spectacle.

It was like the funeral of a sea-king of the old Norse Sagas.

"She was a noble little craft!" exclaimed Flinders, not without emotion. "None better ever feathered a wave-crest, and nothing of double her size and strength ever did half so much hard fighting or conquered half so much. It's like losing an old, true friend. But then I suppose it's the right thing that she who was a witch of the fog should have her ending thus on the wide blue water in a shroud of fire."

Neither Dareall nor Junk made any comment.

But Jack Grantby, the little British midshipman, who had been placed on parole, and was once more at the young commander's side, was not ashamed to look up at him and betray the great tears that were rolling down his cheeks.

"I commanded her, just for a little while," said he, somewhat brokenly. "Didn't I, captain?"

Dick nodded.

"Well, sir," gulping down a sob, "it's a shame, a bloody, blasted shame! Shiver my timbers fore and aft if it ain't!"

The privateer made a brief run out to sea, in the hope of getting a glimpse of the vessels that had robbed her of the chief fruits of her glorious victory, but without success.

When Dick Dareall returned to Tom's River on the following day, he found himself famous, the report of the privateer's conquests having already spread far and wide, and there was a sealed dispatch from General Washington requesting his presence at headquarters.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

HONORS.

INDEED, from this hour up to the beginning of his second cruise, which was delayed far more than he liked, honors of a scarcely less distinguished nature were showered upon the young commander's head to such an extent that

it might have been turned by them if less equitably balanced.

Upon his coming once more into Washington's presence at Morristown, the general grasped his hand with unusual warmth—for he was not a demonstrative man in the expression of his feelings—and he forthwith demanded a detailed account of his cruise.

His staff, together with other distinguished commanders, were again present, including La Fayette, who had at once greeted him with a French embrace.

But, not at all disconcerted, Dick immediately complied, concluding by saying:

"My only regret is the loss of those last prisoners. There were over six hundred of them, officers and men, the latter including from appearances the best and ablest representatives of the English men-o'-war's-men. I can't get over my chagrin and mortification over the matter."

"It is a serious loss," observed the commander-in-chief, with his accustomed gravity, "but you can't justly be held responsible for it, sir, and the luster of your previous deeds more than covers the discrepancy a hundred-fold. You will now go to Philadelphia, and make your written report to the Congress."

Dareall moved uneasily in his seat.

"I would rather go to sea, general," he said, in a low, embarrassed voice.

"What! immediately again?"

"Yes, general."

"But you are just returned from your cruise, my young friend."

"There is nothing like keeping astir, general."

"It seems to me that your love for the sea is very exceptional, sir, even for a sailor."

"It isn't only the sea I love, general."

And then, little by little, there came out the romance connected with Jessie Dearborn's abduction and her fair cousin's second evanishment.

"This is quite a different thing," observed the commander-in-chief, preserving his grand seriousness, which was more than some others present, including La Fayette, were doing. "What would you first do, captain?"

"Sail up the Savannah River, and bring back my girl at the point of the sword!" was the dauntless and characteristic reply.

There was a general movement of approbation.

"He should have a fleet at his back!" cried La Fayette, with his customary impulsiveness. "But wait; he shall sail with the brave D'Estaing."

But Washington shook his head sedately.

"It would never do, my young friend," he said, impressively. "The British are already occupying Savannah itself in strong force. Your unaided attempt at reprisal would be mere madness."

"Savannah itself?" echoed Dareall, in great surprise. "Why, Captain Dearborn gave me to understand that such news was premature, and it was only the mouth of the river they were holding."

"It is no longer premature. Their last expedition southward was wholly successful. Next month an effort may be made to dislodge them, but not before. You will have to restrain your ardor until then."

A whole month longer to wait, and Jessie still in Collingford's power, without striking an individual blow or firing a gun in her behalf!

Still, it was General Washington who had spoken. The young commander inclined his head submissively, though with a flushed brow and a heaving breast.

"Unless," the commander-in-chief had the pitying indulgence to remark, by way of addendum, "you should see fit to start on a second general cruise while awaiting the organization of the expedition now in contemplation. A privateersman is," with a slight smile, "a privateersman."

Dareall's spirits rose again.

"Thank you, general," he said, rising from his chair. "I shall take the *Sea Witch* to Philadelphia to-morrow."

The commander-in-chief pressed his hand even more cordially at parting than before, the gentlemen of his staff rose as he took his departure, while La Fayette followed him out of the room to give him a farewell embrace.

"*Mon brave! my hero!*" exclaimed the chivalrous young marquis. "Did I not say that you had a great future before you? Ah, you have it already! On then, where glory and honor calls!"

Accordingly, the young privateersman made his preparations immediately upon his return to Barnegat Bay, and the next day set sail for Philadelphia.

He got through the line of the blockaders without misfortune, and reached his destination in due season.

Here new honors were heaped upon him, and the mates and crew of the *Sea Witch* were the lions of the day, while thousands visited the docks for a mere glimpse of the peerless craft.

But the Congress was in its chronic embarrassment, chiefly as to raising money for the prosecution of the war and as to foreign complications; and while a most cordial recognition

of Captain Dareall's services was voted, it was delicately conveyed to him that he might expect the presentation of a sword after his next cruise, when the financial difficulties of the country might be of a less painful nature.

However, Dick Dareall was not fighting for ornamental swords, and he at last, after much circumlocution, managed to secure a large sum of prize-money in advance, the distribution of which among his men served to put them in high good and fresh fighting humor, after which he rather independently announced that he would set out forthwith on his second cruise.

But before this he received a piece of cheering news from the French ambassador, which Washington had probably seen fit to withhold as premature.

This was to the effect that the organization of the expedition for the relief of Savannah was already well under way, that the movement would doubtless take place in the latter part of the next month (September), and that it would comprise a combination of land forces under General Lincoln, then in command at Charleston, and the French fleet under Admiral D'Estaing.

It was on a superb morning in the middle of August that the *Sea Witch*, freshly provisioned and with her full complement of men, again set sail down the Delaware, the national flag fluttering proudly at her spanker-gaff, amid the acclamations and godspeeds of on-looking thousands.

On entering the bay, she made a splendid run to Cape Henlopen, flouted to scorn two stately but cumbersome blockaders who would gladly have inquired into the particulars of her searand, captured and fired a luckless transport thirty miles to eastward of the capes in order to get her hand in, and it was then once more, *Hey for blue water, glory and prize-money!*

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE SECOND CRUISE.

DAREALL's general plan for this second cruise, as he briefly explained to his two mates, was to make a run for the nearer West Indies, while giving the coast a pretty wide berth, and then return by a wide seaward curve, so as to be in the vicinity of Savannah, on the lookout for the relief expedition, at the end of four or five weeks.

This plan of cruise was cordially acquiesced in by Junk and Flinders, though both were of the opinion that it was a very liberal one for the short space of time allotted.

"Oh, we can curtail the southward cruise at our pleasure, if necessary," said Dick, laughing. "But, for my part, I anticipate swift and short work while it lasts."

And he was not out of the way in his anticipations, as the event proved.

Vigorous and favoring winds were experienced from the first, and the *Witch* had a magnificent ten days' run down the coast, capturing, burning or sending off to French ports, as the case might be, prize after prize in rapid succession, and almost without a pause.

She at last found herself off the Florida Keys with a list to her credit that included seven transports, nine store-ships and two armed convoys, in ballast, destroyed, and twelve merchantmen, one armed brig, and one armed transport, carrying six companies of Hessians destined for the British southern army of occupation, sent off, with their respective prisoners, together with those captured from vessels destroyed, under competent prize-crews.

This was scarcely preceded in the entire annals of privateering.

But her extraordinary luck did not stop here. While rounding out seaward between the Keys and the Andros Islands, for the return-loop northward among the Great Bahamas, she sighted and gave battle to the British armed hermaphrodite brig *Romulus*, which, by superior sailing qualities and long-range firing, she succeeded in compelling to strike her flag after a fight of seven hours.

This prize was a valuable one, not only by reason of the stores and ammunition she contained, but because more than half her crew of eighty, all told, consisted of Americans from along the Connecticut coast-line, who had been pressed into the hostile service, and were only too glad to enroll themselves with the privateer's crew, thus more than replacing the draft that had been made on her force by the exigencies of prize-crew duty.

Having disposed of the hermaphrodite, the *Witch* continued her voyage without further incident until somewhere off San Augustine, when a small and clumsy-looking, but staunch-built little sloop was sighted and hailed, which proved to be a sister privateer, the *Good Enough*, Skipper Josiah Whalebone commanding, and with a crew of but twenty men, from the vicinity of Cape Cod.

The skipper came aboard the *Witch* at Dick's invitation, and proved a not uninteresting and rather eccentric individual, whose quaint talk and admissions furnished not a little amusement for his entertainer and his two mates.

He was a long, awkward, slab-sided, shrewd Down-East cod-fisherman, and his crew were

enterprising Yankee men and boys of the same stripe. He frankly acknowledged that his flyer had been anything but an oyster-sloop before setting out upon her adventurous and warlike career, and furthermore, confessed that, while actuated by patriotic motives in the abstract, he and his bold crew were solely out on the make, and regarded the voyage as a purely business venture which they intended should pay at all hazards.

"But look here, friend," cried Dick. "You can't tackle a Britisher of any force with that old walnut-shell of yours."

"We're not tacklin' that sort," calmly replied Skipper Whalebone, taking a sip of his grog. "We're not lookin' for tough meat, but gravy."

"Gravy?"

"Yes; soup, you understand—brads, sponduligs, the wherewithal, loot, plunder, pickings, coin, trinkets—anything that can be turned over real neat, you know, from a gold watch to a barrel of fish-oil."

"Ah! but your sloop didn't strike me as having much of an armament."

"No armament, eh? Jee-whiz! didn't you notice that twelve-pounder at the Good Enough's stern?"

"I believe I did remark some sort of a pop-gun there."

"Pop-gun? Holy mackerel! you ought to see that stern-chaser bore a hole through a British fishin'-smack, at a full quarter of a mile, too. Easier'n fish-bait!"

"Rather long range that, isn't it?"

"Prehaps, though we git in on a shorter if we kin. Mostly, you see, we sneak in on 'em sort of onuspicious-like, an' then bang away, an' pile over the gunwales like mad—that is, if they ain't no stronger than we be, you know."

"Quite prudential tactics, to be sure. Do you generally choose fishing-smacks for your noble prey?"

"Waal, about that size, you see. We ain't a-takin' any desperate chances."

"I should say not. But one would scarcely suppose you'd get much of what you call gravy out of that sort of game."

"Waal, now that depends. We ain't done so tarnation bad since we left our gals at the Cape."

"What prizes have you made, if it is a fair question?"

Skipper Whalebone finished his grog, and began to enumerate meditatively on his fingers, with a shrewd, avaricious look on his hatchet face.

"Waal," he answered slowly, "there's the provision yawl we captured off Block Island. She was the fu'st, and we ain't quite e't up the cabbages an' turnips we got off of her yet. Then there was the old Englishwoman's bum-boat that we snatched bald-headed jest inside of Narragansett. Pies, cakes, cold waffles an' doughnuts! After that we surprised a lighter off Sandy Hook, and gobbled her money-chest. Seven pounds, six-and-four-pence! Jee-whiz! think of that, will ye? And sence then—"

"Well, never mind taxing your memory any further, Mr. Whalebone. I've no doubt you and your daring ship's-company are on the high road to wealth and glory. Here's looking toward you, and hoping you won't be hanged in the long run!"

The Cape Codder made a wry twist of his long scrawny neck, as he touched his replenished glass to the young commander's, Junk and Flinders also drinking the pledge with unmoved countenances.

"You be a letter-of-marque, ben't you?" he observed.

"Yes."

"Well, we ben't."

With that he made his adieux, and a little later on his uncouth little sloop was sheeting to the south, with a much better showing of speed than might have been expected of her, and the American ensign streaming from her spanker gaff.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE SEA WITCH TO THE RESCUE.

"It's a shame that such a mercenary little brute of a craft should be permitted to pick up carrion under the same flag that we fly and fight under!" was Dick Dareall's audible comment while following the Good Enough with his eyes from the quarter-deck of the Sea Witch.

"What's the odds?" growled Junk, in his gruff way. "They'll all be hanged by the British sooner or later, every hatchet-faced son of a sea-cook of 'em."

"You're both a little out, mates," interposed Flinders, with an air of speaking from experience. "She only flies the American flag for our benefit. I'll bet a dollar to a fish-hook that she's got an ensign of every nation under the sun stowed in her locker, to be used on occasion. The coast just swarms with contemptible riff-raff of that sort, calling themselves privateers."

But there was one valuable piece of information that had been obtained from Captain Josiah Whalebone, of the Good Enough.

This was to the effect that a French privateer, carrying a fleet of seven French men-of-war cruising a few miles out to sea, had been located by the Cape Codder, three days before.

From this information it seemed evident that the Savannah relief expedition was rapidly maturing its preparations for action.

The privateer accordingly piled on all she could carry into the teeth of the northeast wind that was blowing, and every one was impatient to arrive upon a scene that promised to be so momentous.

The next day, when twenty miles off Hilton Head, without having sighted a sail, the distant sounds of a heavy cannonading attracted her attention to seaward, and her course was laid accordingly.

"It's an unequal fight," announced Flinders, with his glass leveled, after the cannonading had continued to grow more and more distinct. "A ship and a brig attacking another ship."

At eight bells in the afternoon the contestants were plainly made out for what they really were.

A French frigate was being hotly engaged by a British corvette and sloop-of-war, the latter but little inferior in size and strength to her companion-ship.

"Ha!" exclaimed Dareall; "one of our French friends in trouble? But we must take a hand here."

The schooner was accordingly headed direct for the sloop-of-war, which was hanging off from the common enemy at about a mile's distance, leisurely raking her fore-and-aft as opportunity offered, while the corvette was engaged in closer work.

It was easy to see that the Frenchman, a fine double-decker, could have easily disposed of either of her antagonists single-handed, though it was equally evident that she must sooner or later succumb to their combined attacks.

"Doesn't the Frenchman look somewhat familiar?" asked Dareall, while the privateer was sailing in.

"Yes, Cap," replied Flinders, to whom the question had been addressed. "She is the frigate that took the Agamemnon off our hands."

"Ah, the Revolution, Captain Delamont! Well, we'll endeavor to take the sloop off her hands. Turn about is fair play."

The privateer pursued her usual tactics of preliminary long-range fighting when engaging a vessel of superior force.

Her approach had doubtless already been remarked by the sloop, which, however, had continued banging away at the sore-pressed Frenchman, as if disposed to hold quite cheaply such interposition as was threatened.

But the first shot from the Witch's bow-chaser, and landed by old Barbareau plump into her port fore-chains at a distance of fully three miles, was enough to alter her opinion in this respect.

She at once ceased her heretofore game, and began to turn her attention wholly to the new-comer.

But she seemed to be armed almost exclusively with twenty-fours, and not the best of them, at that.

All of her shots fell ridiculously short, so that the Witch was enabled to slip in upon her within a two-mile range, whence she rapidly got in her good work with but little danger of napping a return fire.

Her magnificent sailing qualities also were speedily manifest.

A fresh northeast wind was blowing, which was just the sort that a square-rigger most liked, but the sloop vainly attempted again and again to come to closer quarters.

The schooner kept her distance with consummate ease and judgment, planting her iron when and where she would with bow or stern-gun, under the peerless marksmanship of Barbareau or Flinders, as the case might be, devoting her attention almost exclusively to her enemy's spars.

Suddenly old Barbareau, after delivering with the bow-gun, straightened himself up to his tall height, and, flapping his elbows against his sides, crowed out lustily, like a chanticler:

"Ze meezan-mast of ze Bulldog!" he cried. "Vatch it! Ah! ze gun of brass is a good gun and ze ball of iron is a good ball."

The sloop's mizzen-mast was seen to totter and then go by the board, while an exultant cheer burst from the privateer's deck.

"Well done, monsieur!" cried Dareall. "A few more of that sort, and we'll have her at our mercy."

"Maircy, is it, capitaine?" responded Barbareau. "Ah, but there should be no maircy! Zeze brutal British; zey s'ould be swep' off ze face of ze wave zat zey pollute!"

Here, the schooner having rounded out, Flinders let go with the stern-gun, and with scarcely less success than his rival gunner's, the sloop's main-topmast being neatly eliminated.

The sloop was now comparatively disabled, only a dozen or more shots from the wary privateer serving to complete her dismantling.

"We'll board her presently," observed Dick, at last. "It appears to me, from the slowness with which she cuts away that wreckage aloft, that she is more than likely short-handed, which would put us on something like even terms; and we haven't had a good old-time boarding fight in this cruise. Lay her aboard at once, Mr. Junk."

While this was being done, the glasses were directed at the Frenchman and her remaining contestant, now about four miles to windward.

It was perceived with much satisfaction that the double-decker was now polishing off the corvette to her heart's content, and, having done harsh work on her tops, was now also about to lay her antagonist aboard.

The sloop was by this time manifesting a desire to draw out.

But, as the privateer rushed in to closer quarters, Barbareau continued to play out with the bow-gun so successfully that the sloop's entire foremast at last went by the board, and, in addition to being by this time a temporary wreck, she for some reason could not work her broadside guns that were presented to the schooner's in-coming rush.

"Boarders to the front!" shouted Dick, at last. "Pipe to quarters, Mr. Junk. This thing is coming to a head."

CHAPTER XL.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

THE boatswain's whistle screamed a battle-note, the men rushed to quarters after snatching muskets, cutlasses, hatchets and boarding-pikes, and, as the schooner rounded in upon her larger but disabled foe, her broadside charged with shrapnel and canister swept the other's deck at cable's-length with terrific effect.

Still there was a mysterious failure to reply on the part of the sloop, such as might have been expected, especially as she was beating to quarters for the hand-to-hand struggle that was imminent.

"What ship is that?" shouted Dareall, springing to the starboard rail of his poop.

"His British Majesty's sloop-of-war Falcon," was the gruff response. "What craft are you?"

"The American letter-of-marque Sea Witch!"

As this last response rung across the interval, there was noted a sudden panicky movement among the serried masses of the sloop's men, which was highly complimentary to the fighting notoriety which the privateer had by this time earned for herself.

"Do you surrender?" was the next shouted question from the schooner.

A grim laugh, preceding the words, "Not yet awhile!" though there was also manifest a certain want of confidence in their utterance.

Then the opposing bulwarks clashed against each other, there was the clanking of grapnels making fast, and the privateersmen, with Dareall and his two mates at their head, poured over upon the man-of-war's deck.

But, much to the astonishment of the assailants, but a feeble and wavering resistance was made, notwithstanding the bravery of the British officers in endeavoring to bring their men to the mark.

And this, also, notwithstanding that the sloop's crew on sight were fully equal in numbers to their assailants, if not more numerous.

At the first onset, in fact, a large section suddenly withdrew to the fore-castle, while the remainder, after a desperate but brief resistance, incontinently threw down their arms.

Their commander and his officers at this suddenly made gestures of surrender, and the sloop-of-war, a fine vessel, was the privateer's prize.

The mystery of the easy victory was soon afforded.

Fifty of the sloop's crew of a hundred and ninety men were Irishmen who had attempted a mutiny instantly upon perceiving the American ensign at the new-comer's gaff, and, after being overpowered, had been placed in irons in the hold.

Then, prior to the engagement, a fortunate raking broadside from the Frenchman had or upset every gun in the sloop's port broadside, which explained why she had become so comparatively helpless after being robbed of her sailing efficiency.

"It was just cursed luck!" exclaimed her commander, while making his formal surrender of the ship. "We can never get these blasted Irishmen to fight against your flag with any sort of heart. It's a marvel to me why they enlisted at all."

"Perhaps you don't treat them very well at home," suggested Dareall, with a smile.

"As well as they deserve, curse them! What are Irishmen fit for, anyway?"

"Well, they seem to have caused you the loss of your ship, at all events."

The prisoners in the hold, on being released, came up with a tremendous "hooroo."

They were wild but honest fellows from Galway, Connemara and Tipperary, who instantly wanted to have their "Sassenach" officers yard-armed forthwith as soon as they discovered the changed state of the situation.

This demand Dareall, as a matter of course, explained to them could not be acceded to.

The section of men who had sulked at the beginning of the boarding fight were also Irishmen in part.

"We never want to fight against you," one of the more intelligent of their number explained, with a richness of brogue not to be spoiled by an effort to reproduce it, to the privateer's officers

later on. "For we know you are fighting for liberty, and that is what we want, but never get without coming to America for it."

The Falcon was a sixteen-gunner, and, apart from the prisoners taken, proved a magnificent prize.

By the time that order was somewhat restored, the French frigate, which had made a prize of the corvette, joined the privateer, and the two commanders were soon together in the cabin of the Sea Witch, it being now about nightfall.

It was a high compliment for the captain of a frigate to come on board the privateer, instead of requesting her commander's presence on board of his stately craft.

But Captain Achille Delamont was very grateful for the service that had been rendered him, besides having another matter to discuss.

"Ah, my friend!" was one of his first greetings over their wine; "what do I not owe you? The two Britishers together would have undoubtedly thrashed me soundly, save for your dashing interposition. A friend in need, indeed, you were!"

"Our countries are allies, monsieur," was the smiling reply. "You have nothing to thank me for."

"Oh, but pardon me, monsieur. I am sure there is much, very much! However, in boarding the sloop, you doubtless remarked that she had previously suffered not a little from one of my broadsides, eh?"

Dick smiled as the other matter of the Frenchman's solicitude was now becoming apparent.

He was a brisk, dark little man, was this French frigate captain, with a pointed nose, an enormous mustache, and twinkling little black eyes, like beads, that were set so far back under his bushy brows as to resemble those of a terrier looking out from a rat-hole. And, though he was doubtless an accomplished navigator and a fearless man, there was a suggestion of greediness, or avariciousness, about him that some would not have deemed agreeable, though the commander of the Sea Witch, with his habitual good-nature, found him more amusing than unpleasant.

"Exactly, monsieur," the latter genially replied. "In fact, you had disabled her entire broadside, so that her capture by me was greatly facilitated. I was going to suggest that we go shares in the sloop, half and half."

"My friend, my friend!" cried Delamont; "you are a gentleman, you are noble, you should have been born in France," and almost weeping, he fell upon the young man's neck.

This matter having been arranged to the little captain's satisfaction, Dick anxiously inquired as to the whereabouts of Admiral d'Estaing's fleet.

"What! you have not heard?" cried the other.

"No, I am just up from a southern cruise."

"We shall pulverize these shop-keeping aristocrats, my dear friend!" cried Delamont, enthusiastically.

"With all my heart, monsieur! But the fleet?"

"Ah, I am on my way to rejoin it. You shall accompany me in your matchless schooner, my dear!"

"Just my desire, when I learn where the fleet is."

"Forgive me, my friend; I am forgetful. Always an after a great and glorious success for my country's arms. Two men-of-war—an immense corvette and a powerful sloop—prizes to my little frigate out yonder! *Mon Dieu!* it is scarcely preceded. The fleet, my boy! It is off Charleston, waiting to convoy the land forces under your gallant General Lincoln. There were but two blockaders—they fled like frightened gulls at our victorious approach. The expedition starts for Savannah to-morrow. Hurrah! Yes; we will pulverize these beer-drinking beef-eaters. Thanks; one more glass of wine, then, and I must return to my frigate. Duty calls, while Glory smiles!"

The weather was magnificent, and the wind continued favorable.

By midnight the stately prizes, with their respective captives, had been sent off in charge of French prize-crews.

In company with the Revolution, the privateer then set sail for Charleston.

The harbor was sighted at daybreak of the following morning, together with the French fleet.

All was activity and movement, presenting a stirring scene.

The sails gleamed; songs of sailors at their work were heard; bunting was flaunting in the fresh, warm wind; it seemed that auspices of victory were in the air.

It was soon after breakfast, at eight bells, that Dick Dareall again stepped on board the admiral's flagship, the great ship of the line Agincourt, and once more grasped the hand of the genial and valiant Count d'Estaing.

"Ah, my son, welcome, welcome!" was the admiral's greeting, as he led his visitor a little apart on the spacious quarter-deck, thronged with officers in their rich uniforms. "So you

are famous at last? You have yet further distinguished yourself!"

"My brave officers and ship's-company have, at all events, admiral," was the smiling response.

"Don't be over-modest, monsieur. Modesty makes the woman, but mars the man."

"But I am here to fight with you, admiral, and not to listen to compliments, by your leave. The expedition is on the point of starting, it seems?"

The admiral pointed to Morris Island, south of the harbor entrance, where the American troops could be seen embarking on transports at a point quite near where Fort Sumter was subsequently to be erected.

At the opposite side of the harbor mouth appeared Sullivan Island, with Fort Moultrie on its extreme southern point, where the British under Sir Peter Parker and General Clinton had been so signally repulsed in the initial year of the war.

"Voilà!—behold!" cried the admiral. "There they are, my friend. We sail in an hour and should enter the mouth of the Savannah River by noon, this favoring wind continuing. You will be welcome with your glorious Sea Witch."

"But, admiral," said the young commander, with some embarrassment, "I want to act independently—that is, to a certain degree, at least. It is indispensable that I should."

"Independently?"

Count d'Estaing slightly frowned.

CHAPTER XLII.

WITH THE EXPEDITION.

DAREALL hastened to explain himself.

In fact, he did not rest until he had acquainted the count with the story of his heart, and all that it implied.

A French gentleman of the old school is nothing if not romantic, or chivalrous, and Count d'Estaing, who had had many gallantries in his day, was not an exception to the rule.

His frown had quickly given way to a genial and sympathetic expression.

"Enough!" he exclaimed, freely. "I understand. The young demoiselle and her cousin, you have reason to believe that they are now in Savannah?"

"I have," was the reply.

"Restrained of their freedom by this unprincipled Lothario, you suppose?"

"Hold on, by your leave, admiral!" Dick had colored—not being himself a Frenchman. "Colingford can't be called that, villain that he is. He wants to marry my girl against her will, that is all."

"Ah!"

"Yes; and, you see, she is the one he restrains. Her cousin, Miss Goldheart, is rather with her for company's sake than by compulsion. But then she, also, has her troubled romance—a discarded suitor, who influenced her flight by threats, and may be pestering her now in safety, for aught I know: I refer to Captain Romney, of the British Navy, in her case."

"Ah, I recollect the name. You captured him more than once?"

"Yes; and he as many times effected his escape."

"This is really very interesting—a double romance, so to speak!"

"Yes, admiral."

"The fair cousin, Miss Goldheart, would only require a true lover in her case, equally eager with yourself for rescue and revenge, to make the similarity complete."

"There is just such a one, admiral; he is with me on the Sea Witch."

"Good, good! We are fairly launched in our romance. Tell me, my friend; you want to act independently, but in what way?"

"You anticipate resistance at the mouth of the river, admiral?"

"Undoubtedly! They have two forts there, besides their blockaders that have united in the vicinity. It will be no child's play. In fact—but I say this in confidence, my friend—I am not so intensely sanguine over the result as your General Lincoln and his officers seem to be."

"Then, sir," observed the privateersman, reflectively, "I should like to go into the river in advance of you without showing any colors, you understand—and as if pursued by your fleet."

Count d'Estaing looked at him a moment, and then grasped his hand impulsively.

"I do understand!" he cried. "My son, you are a tactician—you should have been in a great navy from the first, with an adequate field for your talents. So be it. Leave the matter with me for arrangement with my post-captains. My friend, adieu! and may God in his infinite wisdom keep you!"

He embraced his guest with effusion, and they separated.

"I do wish that these French gentlemen were not so fond of hugging and kissing a fellow!" thought Dick to himself on his way back to the Witch. "It is well enough with one's girl, but with another man—pah! However, they're impulsive devils, with their shrugs and their grimaces, and I suppose it's a custom of their country."

When the expedition got under way, a little later on, presenting a stirring and gallant spec-

tacle, the Sea Witch was in the van—a position she was enabled to maintain at her pleasure and ease, notwithstanding that the French ships and transports were cracking on all they could carry.

Dareall had acquainted Junk and Flinders with his individual plan of action, so approved by Count d'Estaing, and now they proceeded to discuss it in detail.

"There's only one difficulty, in my opinion," observed Junk, in his bluff way.

"What is that?" asked Dick.

"Well, it may be all right if we succeed in passing the forts and getting up into the river, by sailing under false colors, but—"

"Hold on!" interrupted Dareall. "The Witch shall never sail under false colors while I command her. It is proposed to pass the forts by the ruse of flying no colors at all—giving the impression that we are a neutral craft being pursued, you understand."

"Eggsactly!" retorted the old sailor; "and it's just the same thing—false pretenses, one way or t'other."

Dick scratched his head.

"Well," said he, with his reckless laugh, after a pause, "it's got to be, anyway. Go ahead with your 'only one difficulty,' you old sea-bear!"

"As I was a-sayin'," continued Junk, "there's only one difficulty, and that is the danger of our being recognized for what we are by the cut of our jib."

"True," interposed Flinders.

"I have thought all that over," responded Dick, carelessly. "We must take our chances. If our ruse is detected, we are ruined; if not, we get up in the river, and are all right. That is the long and short of it."

Junk suddenly grasped one of his hands and Flinders the other.

The quiet desperation of the enterprise was at last thoroughly understood by both, and they liked it.

Dick returned their hand-pressures with unusual earnestness.

"Now, mates," said he, "as to our course after we do get up in the river—as I feel pretty confident that we shall. Then the only remaining difficulty will be, it seems to me, to locate the young ladies. Have either of you ever been to Savannah?"

No; neither of them had.

"Neither have I. But it must be quite a small place in population, however important it may be in a military sense, when we think that Georgia itself was first settled by Oglethorpe only fifty-odd years ago. So I don't believe we'll have much difficulty in finding out the young ladies' residence, after all."

"Since we're taking our chances," observed Flinders, "we'll trust in luck for that, too."

This finished the consultation, and the indefinite plan of action was thus formulated.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THROUGH SMOKE AND FLAME.

As the mouth of the Savannah River was approached, five large British blockading ships came sailing out to engage the French battle-ships of the expedition.

The latter came in closer, forming their battle-line, with the exception of one vessel, a fast-sailing Toulon corvette, which ventured in yet closer in seeming hot pursuit of the Sea Witch, which was sheeting away from her apparently with the utmost trepidation, as if to gain the protection of the forts.

These latter had already opened fire in support of the naval demonstration, notwithstanding that the nearest Frenchman was as yet more than five miles distant, and the battle may be said to have opened.

The transports, five in number, containing General Lincoln and his troops, two thousand strong, remained a little nearer to the coast-line north of the river, with the right of the French battle-line protecting them, but in readiness to make a landing and attack the fort on that side, in case of encouragement from the result of the water engagement about to ensue.

As for the privateer, she continued her sham flight, having put everything in readiness for the success of her ruse.

Her guns were covered out of sight, appearing as shapeless tarpaulined masses that might pass for almost any sort of innocent cargo. All her crew were below, with the exception of eight or ten, and these were kept hopping about in the performance of the various duties connected with the sailing of the craft. Other changes had been made to enhance the merchantman aspect that was desired. Her officers assumed anxious attitudes, while frequently throwing backward glances at their pretended pursuer. In fewer words, her fictitious character was ably sustained—the general impression conveyed to an observer not in the secret being one of excessive panic and alarm.

At last, however, the corvette had to discontinue her part of the farce out of consideration for her own safety, and the Witch, still making for the river's mouth with desperate speed, was compelled to pass under the stern of a large frigate, holding the left of the slowly advancing

British line, and the name Conqueror at her bow.

"Come to, there, you lubber!" was roared by a huge red-faced man in cocked hat and gold-laced uniform, with epaulettes on his shoulders as big as cauliflowers, while the similarly bedizened officers gathered about him seemed to be intensely amused. "What are you running from? The Frenchman has come about."

"Can't come to, sir!" yelled Dick, in return. "They're after us! Must get inside the forts."

Something more peremptory was then belated, but he only made a frantic gesture with both hands, as if beside himself with fear, and the disguised privateer swept off on her fugitive career.

"So far, so good!" exclaimed Flinders, looking back. "They're laughing fit to split at our 'cowardice,' and the frigate is now moving out in line with the others."

Junk growled out something discontentedly about the shame of even pretending to be cowards, and waddled over to the opposite side of the poop.

But Dareall had good reason to be satisfied with the initiatory success of his ruse, and now, as they reached the river-mouth between the forts, there was good reason to trust that it would be continued.

The cannonading had begun to seaward, the forts themselves were continuing to pop away, though to no use whatever, and it seemed evident that their inmates, having observed the schooner pass under the frigate, seemingly unchallenged, were all the more disposed to deem her a genuine fugitive from the Frenchmen, only anxious to get up the river behind the protection of the batteries.

This consummation, so devoutly to be wished, at length became an established fact.

The cannon continued to roar on either side and among the great battle-ships in the offing, the sulphurous smoke and smell coming in-shore on the wind in dense clouds.

And so, amid fire and smoke and the roar of battle, the disguised schooner finally swept, unchallenged, straight through the center of the broad river's mouth, and was soon, comparatively out of danger or even suspicion, well up the bay formed by it, whence she kept up her rapid and exciting course.

"It's a go!" exclaimed the young commander, delightedly. "Junk, tell the men below they can tumble up. They must be half-stifled down below there by this time. Now to get a glimpse at the battle behind us. I'm game for that before anything else."

"So am I!" exclaimed Flinders. "It's only ten miles up to the town, and we ought to find a hiding-place somewhere along here from which we can look back, and see how things are going on."

Such a place of concealment was presently found in a deep, crooked cove, screened by live-oaks and overlooking wild rice-fields at intervals, on the right or southern bank of the stream.

Ample soundings being found, the privateer was accordingly run into this cove so far as to be perfectly concealed from the view of any craft that might chance to pass up or down the main river.

From the bosom of this shelter, the officers and men were enabled to obtain a fine view of the battle from the tops of the masts or of the numerous giant trees surrounding them.

Many of these trees were dead at the summit, though green or partly green below, as a strange effect of the swamp water about their roots, thus affording fine natural lookout stations overtopping the foliage, whence the fight on sea and land could be plainly distinguished with the naked eye, though yet better with the glass, as a matter of course, besides giving an extensive view over the swamps and rice-fields, through which a road was raised between the sea-shore and the town.

Flinders and Dick had secured such a position by hard climbing, together with many others, Junk being left at his own request with about a dozen men in charge of the deck, far down in the shadowy depths.

"We might be taken for crows at a distance," observed Dick, full of the excitement of the thing. "But we can stand that, if we can only see the fight, though this is about the only battle I ever looked on without taking a hand in it."

Then he became absorbed in the stirring and impressive scene that was spread out before them like an animated map or picture.

The battle was at first wholly confined to the ships, the cannonading of the forts amounting to nothing.

Of these there were two, a comparatively insignificant one on the north side of the river, occupying the southern point of one of the South Carolina sea-islands, the other a larger and better-appointed one on the lower shore, and about on the same site that is occupied at the present day by Fort Pulaski.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE BATTLE.

"I don't like the way the Frenchmen are handling their fleet," Flinders called out to his

commander, after viewing the battle in silence for a while. "The tarnation fools! they've got the most ships; why don't they bring 'em all into action, instead of keeping that frigate and corvette doing nothing up yonder but guard the transports? I don't understand it."

"Neither do I," replied Dareall. "I should think the troops might be left to shift for themselves, at least till the sea-fight is decided, or be set about coöperating at once. However, this may all be in the plan of battle, you know."

"Is that D'Estaing's flagship over yonder, Cap., tackling the biggest of the frigates?" Flinders presently called out again.

"Yes," was the response; "and I think her antagonist is the Conqueror, whose stern we so luckily slipped under. Hal but D'Estaing is making the fight of his life there!"

Much of the battle was hidden from view by the dense clouds of smoke, for the wind had fallen off and the atmosphere was growing heavier with a hint of rain.

The cannonading was incessant and all but deafening, even at this distance from the shore, a matter of three miles or more.

Suddenly Jerry Wardlow, who had made his perch on a tree not far from the one in which Dareall and Flinders were posted, and who had a telescope with him, sung out:

"Hurrah! The troops must be going to make a landing soon. Anyway, there come the two battle-ships down upon the smaller fort with the transports behind them."

This was true.

A few minutes later the frigate and corvette already mentioned were seen to open on the fort to the north with shot and shell with great fury.

In less than ten minutes the fort was thoroughly silenced, with the appearance of its inmates having been killed or wounded to a man.

Then the men-of-war crossed the river-mouth, with the troops-laden transports still following at a safe distance, and essayed the same heroic treatment upon the larger fort.

But this was a different sort of customer.

The fort, besides being well-armed and manned, was a well-constructed series of earthworks, provided with bomb-proof pits and magazine.

It was enabled to answer the cannonading shot for shot, and gave no signs whatever of giving in.

Indeed, the men-of-war presently withdrew beyond range, and then the transports were seen passing behind them; after which the troops began to disembark from them in boats at a point further down the beach.

"Aha!" cried Jerry. "They're going to charge Mr. Fort in the rear. That's the intention. Hurrah for our side!"

But they were going to do nothing of the sort.

When all the troops had landed, they were lost to view behind some sandy dunes for a little space.

When they reappeared, it was not on the sandy beach, as might have been expected, but at the lower end of the raised swamp road, whence they were taking their march, drums beating and pipes shrieking, straight up into the country.

"That's the talk!" exclaimed Dareall. "The brave boys! They are leaving the fort for the ships, and are marching on to attack the town itself."

This was really the case, but Flinders, who had chanced to level his glass away in the direction of the town, a steeple or two of which could be just glimpsed in the distance, calling out, in a tone of regret:

"Thunder and lightning! it's too infernally mean. I didn't suppose the Britishers had so many troops right in the town."

"What's up?" cried Dick, also bringing his glass to bear.

"Look back yonder, and see!"

Dick drew a long breath, while Jerry roared out a string of profanity.

There was excuse, if not cause, enough.

Far up the road, three or four miles or more, a body of grenadiers, apparently double the number of the advancing Americans, were rapidly deploying out of a dense wood of live oaks, and forming their line in its skirt, evidently with the intention of giving a warm reception to the would-be assailants of Savannah town.

"It's damnable!" exclaimed Dareall, grinding his teeth. "There are three thousand of them at least, while I don't believe there are more than two thousand of our fellows with General Lincoln."

"Still, our fellows have glimpsed the enemy!" interrupted Flinders. "See! the scouts on horseback are already dashing ahead to reconnoiter; and that must be General Lincoln himself on the big white horse, with his staff officers around him."

"Hurrah!" shouted the boatswain again. "No back track for our boys! There they go on the quick-step!"

Oblivious of the naval engagement for the time being, the lookouts on the tree and masts continued to follow the march of the Continentals; while the grenadiers drawn up in line

across the road, away up at the edge of the distant thicket, were still seen waiting, apparently in grim and stern expectancy.

Then, after half an hour or so, there came the first exchanges of musketry.

The British advanced, and then fell back, in perfect order, and firing volleys continuously.

Then the Americans went forward, only to fall back in their turn, while an attempt to turn the British flank by a charge on the part of the small squadron of horsemen on the American side was seen to be rolled back in confusion.

Then both sides advanced simultaneously, the sharp rattle of the musketry could be distinguished even above the thunder of the cannonading to seaward, and as an intervening timber strip partly shut out the view of the contending little armies, they seemed to be inextricably blended in a furious hand-to-hand battle with the bayonet.

The high-perched spectators awaited the result in an agony of suspense.

It was not of long duration.

In ten minutes the Americans were in full retreat—a retreat that was just not a rout, and that was all—carrying their wounded with them.

The British pursued a short distance, and then came to a halt, doubtless so battered themselves as to rest content with retaining possession of the field.

Back beyond, over the wild rice fields and in among the sparse-growing trees, the ground was more or less strewn with motionless and mangled forms.

It was a defeat!

With heavy hearts, the oddly posted spectators once more turned their gaze toward the sea.

No comfort there!

There was a general cry of dismay.

The smoke clouds were dissipating, showing the French fleet, or what was left of it, falling back on the sea-line, beaten and distressed.

Several of the British ships had also been badly cut up and dismantled. But they were the victors, after a desperate battle, and were slowly making sail after their beaten foes, D'Estaing's flagship sullenly hanging in the rear, like a wounded sheep-dog in defense of his flying fold before victorious wolves.

A French frigate and corvette, comparatively uninjured, still lingered off-shore, however, without molestation, to cover the transports and the reembarkation of Lincoln and his defeated troops.

The combined attack upon the British position at Savannah had been made and repulsed, with a loss of more than one thousand men.

CHAPTER XLIV.

UP THE RIVER.

It was now near nightfall, and the privateer's ship's-company made all haste to return to their vessel, and once more gain the broad river from the depths of the crooked cove, or bayou, that had sheltered them so strangely.

Sad as were their hearts over the distressing spectacle they had witnessed, their individual enterprise was so far secure, if there was any consolation in that.

And, vaunt as we may to the contrary, there is in truth no public misfortune, however nearly our sympathies and interests may be therein engaged, but that can be more or less mitigated to ourselves by a consciousness of our individual security or prosperity as an offset.

The British were still in possession of Savannah, but the privateer was well up the river, still in her disguise of innocence, the one remaining fort at its mouth was not greatly to be feared when the time to run out should arrive, and the blockaders were not likely to return in a hurry from the pursuit of their beaten foe.

That was the privateer's individual situation, and there was no denying that there was both consolation and encouragement in the same.

As she made her way slowly up the river under easy sail, but a small portion of her crew being in view, she passed many small craft coming down for news of the naval battle, but seemed to escape suspicion altogether.

There was still the chance, however, of her being recognized by either Collingford or Romney (should the latter also be in the vicinity, which was more than likely), and, on the outskirts of the town being sighted, Dick and Flinders began to look for a convenient place to anchor for the night, while they should make their quest for the young ladies' whereabouts.

Dusk was fast closing in.

Suddenly Jerry Wardlow exclaimed, his eyes staring at the right or Georgia bank of the river:

"Hallo! No further doubt of our fair doves' bird-cage now, I reckon."

"What do you mean, Jerry?" cried Dareall, in no little excitement.

"Friend Dick, look yonder!"

He indicated with his hand the shadowy out-

lines of a small vessel riding at anchor in a deep indentation of the river-bank, whose rising shore was for the most part heavily wooded.

"At yonder sloop, you mean?"

"Yes, friend Dick."

"What of it?"

"It is Collingford's yacht, the Curlew?"

Dick fairly caught his breath, for it seemed too good to be true; while Flinders, who had overheard the announcement, came bounding to the spot.

"You look, Fog-eye!" exclaimed the young commander, a perceptible tremor in his voice. "I can hardly believe in such a stroke of luck."

Flinders leaned forward, bending his searching gaze through the dusk.

"Jerry is right," he observed. "You are doubtless right about our being in luck, Dick. It is the Curlew. But there is something worth sighting over and beyond her. Where is your night-glass?"

It was produced, and then Dareall perceived by its aid a solitary house.

It was on a hill, a mile or two back from the river on a line with the yacht, was partly embosomed among bowing trees, and lights were beginning to glimmer from its casements.

He lowered the glass, and his hand met the mate's in an instinctive grasp of gratitude and congratulation.

There was a world of meaning between them in that simple grasp of the hand.

They felt that the goal was won, or almost won, and that they were on the threshold of their hopes so long deferred.

A place had been found in which to cast anchor now.

Slowly and cautiously, the privateer was sailed across the stream, and then anchor quietly dropped in deep water back of the river-bay, under the shadow of the overhanging trees, and within two or three cable-lengths of the sloop.

Presently a light glimmered on the deck of the latter, was carried about, and then disappeared below.

Dick and Flinders, the former leaving certain directions with Junk for the conduct of the Witch in case of their failure to return, then set out for the sloop, accompanied by a single rower with muffled oars.

Voices, the voices of negroes, were heard in the fore-castle as they approached.

It thus seemed most likely that only servants were in possession of the vessel.

They silently boarded her, leaving the man in the boat.

Stepping stealthily over the deck, they peered down into the fore-castle.

Four negroes, one of them cooking, were gathered about the galley fire.

The one engaged in cooking was thick-set, squat and muscular. The three others were negroes of huge and powerful frames. All were doubtless slaves, and yet all were armed, as was often the custom in the South during the Revolution, for the British were likewise slave-owners in their colonies at that time, and the American negroes could in most cases be trusted against them. And all possessed sinister and ferocious faces.

Making a significant motion to his companion, Dareall suddenly bounded down the steps, and floored the cook with a tremendous blow under the ear.

Flinders had followed him, and instantly the prostrated man's astounded companions were confronted by leveled cocked pistols in the hands of the two whites, though it was hoped by the latter that their explosive use would not be required.

But the slaves, perceiving their threateners to be strangers, and in spite of their surprise, were not intimidated.

They may have also suspected that the leveled pistols were a bluff.

At all events, they almost immediately drew their weapons—immense and murderous-looking butcher-knives—and with the snarling growl of wolves at bay, suddenly launched themselves upon their assailants, whom they evidently mistook for Britishers, with brute fury.

There was no help for it, the pistols had to be fired.

It was done simultaneously, each bringing down a man, and as the third sprung up the steps, after a ferocious, cleverly-evaded lunge at Flinders, the latter was at his heels, sword in hand.

When Dick followed, the mate was already wiping his sword-blade on a coil of rope, while the corpse of the negro was floating out with the subsiding tide.

"Rather ghastly work!" muttered Dareall; "but there was no help for it, as far as I can see. Come!"

Returning to the galley, the two remaining dead bodies were dragged up and tossed into the stream.

The stunned man was then revived with a dash of water, and made to realize the helplessness of his position.

"All right, boss red-coat!" he said, with a sign of abject submission. "Doan't kill dis nigger, too, please! an' you-uns hab done got de sloop, habn't you?"

"We're not red-coats!" exclaimed the young

commander, sternly; "and we don't want the sloop—not just now at least. Be submissive and obedient, and no further harm shall come to you."

"I done belongs to you now, boss."

"What is your name?"

"Sambo Martingale."

Dick gave a self-satisfied start. He remembered to have once heard that Collingford had relatives, rich planters, of that name somewhere in the South.

"Is yonder your master's house, on top of the wooded hill?"

"It am one of his houses, boss."

"Who is living there now?"

"Marse Collingford, Marse Jack's cousin."

"Any one else?"

"De two young ladies, togedder wif de brack gals that waits on 'em an' keeps 'em from runnin' away."

"What young ladies?"

"Dey done come wif Marse Collingford in dis sloop, long time ago."

"Any one else living at the house?"

"No, boss; dough Marse Romney, he done come dah sometimes."

"Aha!"

"Yes, boss; but I se t'inkin' he doan't come so much now." And a grin spread over the negro's flat, baboon-like face.

"Why?"

"De young lady dat he lub doan't lub him, I reckon," with another grin. "Any way, she done gib him fits de las' time."

"And the other young lady?"

"Marse Collingford done be arter her, but she won't eben speak to him. Hu!"

"Come with us," and Dick led the way back on deck, Fog-eye warily following the negro.

Here Dick reloaded his pistol, as did also his associate.

"You will guide us to the house?" the former demanded of the captive.

The latter readily assented.

"Do so, then. And remember, at the first sign of rebellion, or if you try to give the alarm, it means a bullet from this pistol in your head."

"Yes, boss."

"Get over the side into that boat!"

CHAPTER XLV.

AT THE GOAL.

A FEW minutes later the landing was effected, and the negro, Sambo, was leading the way up a narrow path among the trees, with a pistol constantly clapped to either side of his head.

The moon had risen, and was very bright.

It had been agreed beforehand that in case of the two guest-seekers being compelled to separate, they should make for the privateer each individually on his own account.

And, in case either one of them should be unable to do this, he was to make for the coast, as near the mouth of the river as should be safe, where the privateer would be expected to take him off.

It was, moreover, tacitly understood that neither was to relinquish his quest unless in the company of the young lady in which he was chiefly interested.

The way up through the semi-tropical woods was not an unpleasant one.

The breath of the warm summer air was like the caress of a loved one's hand, and it was fragrant with the scent of wild flowers which, with more light, might have been seen hanging on the great tree-twining vines in milky mosses or graceful trumpet shapes.

They at length got out of the woods, and entered park-like grounds and plantations of vast extent, with the lights of the little house plainly visible half a mile or so further on.

Here they were suddenly aware of the sound of voices, apparently angry ones, not far away, and they came to a momentary halt.

"Gorry!" exclaimed the negro, under his breath.

"You recognize those voices?" demanded Dick, in a cautious tone.

"I done guess at 'em, boss."

"Whose are they?"

"Marse Romney, he mus' be pesterin' de young lady again ober in dat orange grove."

This was not very lucid, but they cautiously approached the grove indicated, the voices quickly resolving themselves into those of Naomi Goldheart and Captain Romney.

Here Flinders requested a halt, and with a gesture he indicated that his quest was at hand, and should be left exclusively to him.

The transfiguring dignity of demeanor had come over him, and he stood noble and erect, but with a certain savagery in his face that was not exactly good to see.

Dick nodded, and a parting hand-grip was exchanged.

"Remember our agreement as to individual action," he muttered.

He then went on alone under the negro's guidance.

Naomi and Romney were in a little moonlight glade among the orange-trees of a large plantation to the right of the path, with a summer-

house near at hand, indicating that it was a sauntering spot perhaps often resorted to.

Naomi was very indignant, the Britisher laboring under suppressed excitement, and the interview had apparently but just begun.

"I tell you, sir," exclaimed the young woman, "I will not have you come here again. And I have said the same thing so often that I should think you would begin to understand, if you have a spark of gentlemanliness remaining."

"I have nothing remaining but my love for you," was the moody response.

"And I will have none of it, sir."

"It was not always thus, Miss Goldheart."

"There might have been a brief space when it was otherwise—a girl's first silly infatuation—but that is long since over and done. Sir, I insist on the discontinuance of your visits."

"But you can't desire the mere companionship of black slaves?"

"My cousin's society suffices me—that is, when her cowardly annoyance gives her a chance to indulge me in it."

"Why are you so changed to me?"

"Sir, I wish to be alone!"

"You once loved me."

"Never! An infatuation, no more."

"You might even have married me."

"And God be praised! I did not."

"Do you, or do you not love another?" he suddenly exclaimed, almost savagely.

She restrained the indignant answer that was evidently on her tongue.

"Perhaps so," was her collected reply.

Romney suddenly gave way to ungovernable temper.

"Foolish girl!" he raved: "think you I will submit tamely to being treated thus—like a cast-off toy, an outgrown caprice?"

"Stand back, sir!"

She was frightened now, and there was desperation in his looks as he advanced a step.

"Naomi Goldheart, I am here to marry you, and," with an oath, "I shall do so sooner or later, if I have to drag you to the altar!"

"Coward! Oh, that my country's brave defenders were in power hereabouts!"

"Brave defenders, indeed! Have they not this day been repulsed, like beaten hounds, from our town gates? And where are the French ships?" with a derisive laugh. "Dismantled, battered fugitives, with the oak leviathans of old England in hot pursuit! Child, you have no country, save what is mine! Your country's defenders? they do not exist, save as ragged vagabonds."

She gave a low cry, that was sufficiently indicative of how the disasters of the day had stricken at her heart and hopes.

"Leave me, leave me!" she faltered. "Go away!"

"I shall not leave you!" he cried, with growing passionateness. "Not till you have promised to be my wife."

"Never!"

"Tell me, then, the name of this other man you say you love, and I will go, at least for this time."

"I did not say I loved another man."

"You hinted that it might be so."

"That is different."

"His name?"

"I shall not tell it. But he is not a Britisher—not one of my country's hated foes—thank God for that!"

A sudden revelation seemed to flash through Romney's mind.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed, with a crackling laugh; "it can't be that lanky, red-headed nondescript who plucked you out of Barnegat Bay?"

Naomi blushed violently, and then became very pale.

"The man who rescued me," she replied, composedly, "had before that saved my brother's life in battle."

He stared at her, and then cried out:

"Great God! it is true, then? Talk of Titania and Bottom, the weaver! But come, enough of this. Have I your promise, or not?"

"My promise?"

"Yes; to be my wife."

"Mr. Romney, you are a fool!"

Losing the last vestiges of self-control, he suddenly seized her wrist, his face convulsed and pale.

"You shall be mine!" he hoarsely exclaimed.

She struggled to release her wrist, but in vain.

"Oh!" she cried; "among all my country's defenders, is there not one to befriend me now?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Your country's defenders? I tell you they do not exist! Come; I must have that promise."

"Liar!" was suddenly thundered forth, and at the same moment he staggered back under a blow in the chest, while Flinders towered above him. "I am the lady's defender—ay, and her avenger!"

Naomi was so dazed and hysterical that she did what otherwise she might never have dreamed of doing.

She threw herself, with a great sob, in Fog-eye Flinders's arms.

CHAPTER XLVI.
ONE LOVE'S TRIUMPH.

FLINDERS, from what he had already overheard, was in a sufficiently ecstatic and bewildered state of mind, apart from his furious resentment against Naomi's insulter, at his first appearance on the scene.

But now to have that beloved and worshiped figure fairly in his arms, close to his breast, her soft arms even tightening around his neck as she wept hysterically upon his shoulder—it seemed altogether fanciful and unreal.

Indeed, he might not have been able to realize it at all, had he not perceived Romney rushing upon him, sword in hand and foaming at the mouth.

"It is true, then!" roared the Britisher. "But she shall not survive this ignominy, this disgrace! This to the hearts of both of you!"

His sword was already drawn back for the fatal double-thrust, when the young woman was flung aside from its passage by a lightning-like movement, Flinders's own sword caught the rushing blade, and turned it aside from his own breast.

Naomi screamed, and stood by with clasped hands.

But the tragedy was of a different character from what might have been expected.

The opposing swords had hardly clashed together in fence when Romney suddenly staggered back, pressing his left hand to his head.

He then pitched forward on his face, and when Flinders stooped over him he was dead.

"It was the wave of blood in his head, I fancy," said Flinders, looking up after a hurried examination. "What is the name for it—Oh, yes; congestion of the brain."

"I suppose so," half-inaudibly.

She was standing there very white in the moonlight, still clasping her hands.

"I am so glad you didn't kill him!" she then managed to say, with a strong effort at composure; a burning shame-faced flush slowly blotting out her pallor, as fire might frost.

"Why?" somewhat stupidly, no less than falteringly in his turn, as he half-wonderingly faced her, like a man in a dream. "He was deserving of the fate that overtook him, man."

"Yes, yes; I suppose so," hurriedly, and half-averting her face. "And I had come to dislike him horribly. But—I am glad it was not you to do it."

"But why?" still wonderingly.

"Come away—this is terrible!" And, still in her painful confusion, she led the way through the grove to a considerable distance from the motionless form. After that she turned to him, a strange vehemence struggling through her shame-facedness. "Oh, sir!" in indescribable excitement; "you are so strong, so brave. Besides, are you not an American, a patriot? And did you not save my life, no less than my brother's? Herbert told me all about it."

Still in his bewilderment, he was about to ask, "What of that?" when suddenly, out of her maiden confusion and trepidation, she gave him a look.

"There is a look which woman gives to man
Once in a lifetime, baring to its shrine
The inmost mystery of her secret heart.
Accused be he who, meeting once that look,
Passes not on, vouchsafing no return;
Or, meeting it, fails not in truth to take
Its jewel-treasure to his inmost soul,
There to hoard up and cherish its sweet fire
Forevermore—his blessing and his prize!"

Then it all rushed upon his simple but grand nature like a revelation.

"Good God!" he exclaimed; "you can't mean that you care for me—me?"

And why not?

She gave but another look—a shy, diffident one this time—and was in his arms.

"I can't understand it—I just can't!" he continued to say over and over again to himself even in the novel and delirious ecstasy of it all. "She—the loveliest in all the world, a lady born—to care for the like of me! I just can't understand it!"

But she could, having the advantage of him there. For he had never seen himself in battle, besides being unaware of the strange constant transformation that had been working in him from the first hour of his ennobling love and worship; a transformation that had wrought not only upon his aspect, but upon his thoughts and speech, as if the vulgar commonplace to which he had been born, and to which he had been bred, were somehow falling off from him like a material shell, to the disclosure of the native worth and manliness beneath.

A veritable and the only true enchantress is Love, its transformations outlasting time itself on into the eternities, when "a thousand years are as yesterday when it is past, and a watch in the night."

But it was not in the nature of circumstances for this strange death-haunted and peril-girt episode of tenderness to last uninterruptedly for more than a fleeting space.

"How and why are you here?" asked Naomi, hurriedly withdrawing from her lover's embrace. "But come; I will try to have Jessie accompany our flight."

"Dick Dareall is looking after her," was the reply. "But you are right. We must hasten up to the house after him."

"Heavens! has he ventured there?"

"Of course; isn't your cousin to be found there?"

"Yes, yes; but little better than a prisoner—surrounded by armed slaves belonging to Mr. Collingford's Tory relative, Colonel Martingale—cruel and relentless wretches at that. I, simply being here as her associate, have less espionage over me, as a matter of course. Come then! Mr. Collingford was to come again with his hideous supplications to-night, and I left Jessie nervous and miserable over expecting him. Besides, the news of the American disasters nearly prostrated us both."

They regained the path and hurried up the hill, side by side.

On reaching the borders of a second plantation, however, in the center of which the house itself stood, a series of yells suddenly burst upon the air from somewhere in the vicinity of the building. They were followed by the clash of steel, a hearty, defiant shout, that was recognized as in Dick's voice, a volley of curses, which were as evidently from Squire Collingford's lips, and the din continued indiscriminately.

Followed by Naomi, Flinders was about springing forward to the rescue when there came the loud ringing report of a pistol of a peculiar resonance or intonation, almost like the jarring of a bell, and he came to a sudden halt once more.

"It is Dick's signal!" he exclaimed. "We are to leave him to his own devices. Such was the agreement between us. Come! to the boat, to the boat!"

He threw his strong arms about her and retraced his steps down the path at all but break-neck speed, sweeping her with him like a sheaf in the crooked arm of a tornado.

Yet swiftly as they sped, he could explain to her the nature of the signal.

"That shot," he said, "was from a great-bore steel-barreled pistol that, together with its mate, can alone give forth that clear, bell-like ring. Its mate is here in my belt. By the signal, Dareall will not attempt to return to the river, but will make his way directly to the coast. Such was the agreement. Had I been similarly circumstanced with you, I would have done the same."

Reaching the boat without mishap, they at once put off in her for the privateer.

To return to Dareall, immediately after separating from Flinders, he had proceeded directly up through the adjoining plantation toward the house.

Voices presently attracted him—women's voices—and, still keeping his guide covered with his pistol, he had cautiously approached the spot whence they proceeded.

To his great joy, he perceived Jessie taking the air on a pretty terrace near the house, closely attended by a muscular black woman, who seemed to have charge of her, and to be very watchful and alert.

Presently, however, as the prisoner sunk listlessly into a rustic seat, her attendant stepped into the house.

"Jessie! Jessie!" Dick cautiously called out, from his place of concealment among some convenient laurels, while pressing his weapon yet more closely to his black guide's temple; "I am here. Come to me—quick!"

She started to her feet, her sweet, sad face lighting up, when the negro, suddenly ducking his woolly head, gave utterance to an ear-piercing warning yell.

CHAPTER XLVII.

FOR LOVE AND LIFE.

THE next instant the negro was a corpse, though not by the pistol that had pressed his temple, Dick having remembered his signal-agreement with Flinders in time to swiftly substitute it for his sword and make the quietus-thrust before the echoes of the alarm had died away.

But it had been enough.

Then, the next moment he had his sweetheart in his arms and was hurrying back through the trees with her in the direction of the path.

But the negro woman had instantly reappeared from the house, taking up the death-silenced alarm.

Armed slaves seemed to spring into pursuit from almost every quarter as if by magic, and then Collingford himself—on horseback, and looking as if just from the town on a hard gallop—was upon the scene, and took in its significance at a glance.

"Upon him!" he yelled, spurring forward in a white wrath that caused the strange throat-encircling birthmark to stand out with lurid distinctness in the moonlight. "Tear her from him! cut him to pieces!"

But Dareall, who had come about-face with his back to a dense evergreen clump, with Jessie tremblingly crouching behind him, had by this time come to the conclusion that it would be impossible for him to retrace his steps toward the river, and that the agreed-on signal to that effect must be made.

Hurling back the primary onset of several of the slaves, all of whom were armed with murderous-looking knives, by stretching two of them lifeless with his sword and wounding several others, he suddenly shifted the weapon into his left hand and drew from his belt the select pistol with his right.

"Come, then, you Tory hound!" he exclaimed, flashing it to an aim as Collingford was madly spurring his steed directly upon him. "I had hoped to reserve you for the hangman's noose for which you seemed to have been predestined ('Rope-mark Collingford,' you know," with a mocking laugh), "but as it is—" But Collingford, in spite of his fury, was clever enough to cause his horse to rear at the critical instant.

The pistol accordingly rung forth its warning, but it was the animal's and not the rider's brain that received the fatal missive accompanying the report.

Then, while the Tory was still struggling to rise, with his leg pinioned under the dying brute, Dareall, thrusting the pistol back into his belt and killing yet another negro assailant with his sword, darted away with his companion, and made feint of dashing down the hill-path.

At the junction of the adjoining plantations, however, he branched off due southward, through the dense wood, directly toward the sea, ten miles away.

And at this juncture, very fortunately for the fugitives, the moon momentarily veiled her light behind a passing cloud.

Collingford, on foot, sword in hand, and with a herd of his kinsman's slaves at his lead, had swiftly followed, until the sudden fading of the moonlight caused him to miss the fleeing forms.

"Quick!" he ordered. "To the beach-road, all of you, in case he might have gone that way. I'll to my sloop alone, to cut them off by the river-line! Off, off!" beating some of them with the flat of his sword, and kicking others. "If they escape, more than one of you shall be skinned alive for permitting it."

Then, as the negroes scattered in the direction indicated, he hurried on unattended down the path.

On he went, passing without dreaming it the little glade in which Romney's body lay stark and cold and stiff in the returning caress of the eerie moonlight.

On, and on! and at last the outlines of his sloop were in sight, riding peacefully in a little bright water-patch among the deep overhanging shadows of the river-bay.

What was this?

Wasn't it a good deal nearer the shore than ordinarily?

No matter. He reached the water's edge, and called out hoarsely, in the inhuman manner of the times when summoning a bondsman:

"Sambo! Scip! Remus! Hannibal! quick—in here with the sloop, or I'll rip off your black hides! Ahoy, I say! What! if you are sleeping on watch, woe betide you! Sambo!"

But he was heard, and by those who were not asleep.

A dusky-seeming head popped out of the fore-castle, to disappear again, and slowly, mysteriously the Curlew quitted her anchorage, and came in-shore.

But in his excitement he did not heed.

"Bestir yourselves, monkeys! baboons!" he cried, scrambling on board. "Did that villain, Dareall, land at this point? It shall be slow-fire torture for you all, should it prove so! Sambo! Remus! where are you? Out of your rat-holes, you black rascals! This shore must be patrolled without an instant's delay, and—"

Here he was roughly collared.

"Yes, we'll attend to that, Mr. Collingford—and be hanged to you!" interrupted old Junk's rasping voice. "Pay off, my lads! we've scotched our snake!"

Three or four of the privateersmen had risen up around the entrance of the Tory as if by magic.

Resistance was useless, and just at this moment, while the sloop was being pushed off into deep water, a spectacle presented itself to the scoundrel's despairing eyes that was to haunt them till the last darkness should shut down over them forever.

It was that of the stately Sea Witch herself, swinging out into the moonlit water from the black shadow of the bank, and with Jerry Wardlow's face among the throng that were grinning remorselessly at him from along her port bulwarks.

"A good-evening to thee, my dear half-brother!" Jerry called out, in his mock sympathetic tones. "What! am I even nearer the heir-ship of the great Collingford estates than I had hoped?"

Collingford had again become livid, the throat-girdling mark once more standing out with startling distinctness. Then he covered his face with his hands, and threw himself prone upon the deck without a groan.

In the mean time, Dick Dareall, had got well on down with Jessie through the heavy wood into which he had diverged, when the yells of the negroes once more sounded in his pursuit.

"One more fight for it, my love!" said he,

cheerfully; "and then I fancy we shall be rid of this especial breed of enemy, at least."

Fortunately, another evergreen clump was at hand for him to back up against, and there was still time to reload his discharged pistol, there being three others in his belt, and when the black savages were again upon him, he was once more in position, with Jessie behind him as before.

Blindly obedient to their taskmaster's cruel mandates, and doubtless incapable of comprehending the meaning of humanity in their own behalf, or even in the abstract, they came with the blind, impetuous savagery of wolves, swinging their long knives, their blood-shot eyes glaring, and many of them frothing at the mouth.

"It's a pity to slaughter such unreasoning, irresponsible beings as these," muttered the young commander between his teeth. "But there is no help for it, that I can see."

"Crack! crack! crack! and then crack-ding-dong!" went the four pistols in rapid succession, the bell-toned barker last, and each tumbling its human billet headlong to the fresh turf.

And then his sword was playing out before him, like a hundred tongues of pointed silvery flame, till the bodies of the on-coming herd were piled up one above another in a semicircular breastwork around him.

It was only when half had been slain that the remnant turned and fled away, yelling and appalled, amid the wood.

Dick lost no time in continuing his flight, Jessie and he having an ample opportunity for the exchange of news items and confidences during its continuance.

At last they reached the beach road, and the comparatively unobstructed swamps and rice plains stretching away toward the coast.

But by this time they were almost completely exhausted, the young man having to support or half-carry his companion at intervals; and there was the new danger of coming upon the camp of the Britishers who had triumphed in the battle of the afternoon.

But at this juncture, when they were resting temporarily under some low trees, a whinny was heard a short distance off.

Dick uttered a joyful exclamation, and pointed with his hand.

"We are saved!" he cried.

A group of horses—doubtless freed by the death of their riders in the battle, and some of them still retaining their equipments—were quietly grazing in the swamp quite near at hand.

In a short time one of them had been secured, Dareall was in the saddle with his sweetheart before him, and their motto was still "For Love and Life," with the prospect brightening before them.

The military camp was found to have been abandoned, doubtless by the withdrawal of the troops back into the town.

But the experiences of our fugitives had been none the less prolonged and severe, and it was daybreak when they reached the beach at or near the point at which General Lincoln and his devoted Americans had made their ill-starred landing twelve or thirteen hours previously.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

BATTLE-SUNSHINE.

"We're in luck, my darling Jessie!" cried Dick, as he helped his sweetheart to alight, and once more gave the faithful chance-found steed his liberty. "Look out yonder!" pointing seaward.

She was very pale, and tottered so much that he supported her in his arms, his dark eyes brimming with their pity and love.

Still she managed to stand erect a moment and look away.

"Ah!" with a glad little cry of thankfulness; "the privateer, the Sea Witch!"

Then she fell into his arms again, and would have fainted had he not sprinkled her face with the cool brine from the running wave.

Yes; the Sea Witch, indeed, well off-shore, and apparently with a smaller craft in her company and looking as if she might have been patrolling the coast for hours in a vain search for these very two who were now so overjoyed at sighting her.

Dick's signal was speedily answered by a salute from the swivel-gun amidships (and this was about the first and only use that that same little swivel had been put to thus far), and a boat was seen putting out from her.

It was the long-boat, with four good men at the oars and Fog-eye Flinders himself waving his hand from the stern sheets.

Jessie was weeping tears of joy on her lover's shoulder as the hands of the two friends met in their greeting grip.

Ten minutes later she was in Naomi's arms on the privateer's quarter-deck, while a tumultuous cheer of thankfulness over their young leader's return was springing from the hardy crew.

It was not till then that the young commander and Jessie noticed that the companion vessel was the sloop Curlew, and that she was strangely, not to say hideously, ornamented.

It was by the body of a freshly-hanged man dangling out over the sea from her spanker gaff

—and that man the Tory, Henry Collingford, her whilom proprietor.

Jessie shuddered, and hid her eyes in Naomi's bosom.

"By whose orders was that done?" demanded Dareall, sternly.

"By Junk's and mine together," replied Flinders, boldly. "We were afraid you might relent toward him, so we took time by the forelock. What's the odds, Dick? Rope-mark Collingford but fulfills his destiny at last!"

And he forthwith gave a hurried sketch of his own experiences with Naomi, including the death of Romney, and of the manner of the Tory's capture.

The sternness in the young commander's face relaxed, and he shook hands with both Flinders and Junk.

"It is just as well," he said, "though you need not have been afraid of my relenting."

He then gave orders for putting to sea at once, and took Jessie below with him for breakfast and recuperation generally.

The Curlew had been manned by a dozen men from the privateer's crew, and Jerry Wardlow placed in command.

When the sloop followed her stately mentor out to sea, a short time later, the ghastly decoration at her spanker was no longer visible, but buried without ceremony beneath the waves.

By the sheerest good luck, the Witch had repassed the fort at the river-mouth without even being challenged; but there was still the most imminent danger of her being intercepted by one or another of the British blockaders on their way back to the coast from their pursuit of the defeated French fleet.

Indeed, Dick had only just finished his breakfast, while Jessie was being cared for by her cousin in the after cabin, which had been resigned wholly to their use, when "Sail ho!" from the crow's nest brought him tumbling on deck again, with his fresh-lighted cigar between his teeth.

"What do you make of her?" he cried to Flinders, seizing a glass himself.

"A British sloop-of-war," was the reply.

"She's making to cross our course, too, and if the wind continues favorable for her, she ought to succeed in doing it."

"So much the better—or shall we cross hers?" cried Dareall, all the dauntless, fight-loving instinct rising in him seemingly with redoubled zest now that love and vengeance were equally his. "Bring her about on the port tack at once. That is just what we will do. Who is acting as boatswain in Wardlow's absence?"

"Revels," replied old Junk, whose watch it was, after giving the necessary order.

"Well, have him pipe to quarters without delay; and then have the guns stripped of those accursed tarpaulins, that we may be ship-shape once more. To the deuce with shams, whether fair in war or not! The Witch is through with them, at all events, and is henceforth a fighting ship, open and aboveboard, with a fighting crew, while a stitch draws or a plank swims!"

This gallant sentiment, no less than the free oath that rounded it off, was heartily echoed by all who heard it.

When the sloop-of-war, for such it proved to be, came in full view, it was remarked that all of her tops, with the exception of her fore, were either dismantled or badly damaged, while her hull also bore indications of hard knocks, and yet she seemed full of fight and determined to have it.

"About ship, and pepper the old girl at long range!" cried Dareall, laughing. "The Frenchmen have evidently given her some back-kicks, but if she's aching for more, straight from the front, it's a pity she should be disappointed."

CHAPTER XLIX.

LAST KNOCKS, BUT HARD ONES.

THE sloop-of-war was by this time but three miles away, and Fog-eye Flinders, after a last studious observation, gave it as his opinion, which had come to be regarded as nothing less than a certainty in this line, that, in addition to being already knocked up considerably, she was short-handed.

Then, hardly were the defiant words out of Dareall before she was seen to yaw, there was a smoke-wreath from her bow, and the round shot that followed whistled directly across the Witch's midships, though fortunately without doing any damage.

"A forty-two-pounder, by jingo!" cried Salty Junk, stamping his foot.

"Just that, and nothing else or less," observed Dick, coolly. "Pay off for a longer range, Flinders, and we'll give her a taste of our stern-gun while doing so. We're not hankering for any more such close shaves as that one."

The order was duly executed, the shot knocking a good chip off the big stranger's bowsprit.

After that, the Witch was kept further out of range, and as much as possible away from the bearings of the enemy's formidable gun, that appearing to be the only forty-pounder (an unusual caliber for sea-fighting in those days) she possessed, and quite enough in the bargain.

Once, however, in making a necessary tack,

with the Curlew for company, as a matter of course, the privateer was compelled to expose herself once more to its giant sweep, and with disastrous consequences, though not to herself.

"Look out, and let her off three points!" shouted Flinders, at the critical moment, glass to eye in watch of the piece's manipulation.

"Quick, or it is too late! There!"

The schooner's helm had been put down hard at the warning, though, and she fell off just enough to avoid the huge shot that followed it.

Only for her crew to hear a loud cry to leeward, however, and then the little Curlew was seen to have practically disappeared—knocked clean to pieces by the bolt ripping her fore and aft just above the water-line, from cutwater to stern-post.

"Lower away for 'em!" cried Dareall, bursting into a laugh upon perceiving that none of the abolished sloop's crew, all of whom were swimming vigorously among the wreckage, appeared to have been hurt. "Good riddance, anyway. I should always have felt that there was something uncanny about that craft, had she lived."

Nearly every one else had the same sort of impression, with the single exception, perhaps, of Jerry Wardlow, who, upon being picked up with the rest of the swimmers, looked back a little ruefully at the spot that had known the yacht, but knew her no more.

"It was my property at the last, you know," he observed, "and it's a fresh personal grudge I've got against the Britishers," shaking his fist at the man-of-war. "However, I'll have plenty to buy another with when I step into the estate—that is, if there's anything left of it after I make the money fly among the old boys."

Which was doubtless all very heartless enough (though Jerry had strongly dissented to the hanging of his half-brother, by the way), but family bitternesses were perhaps more sharply pronounced in that day than in this; and it was notorious that the rich squire had treated his happy-go-lucky relative with contemptible niggardliness from the first, even withholding a trust-fund that had been left for his education, and barely according him the privilege of a home at the Hall.

"Let me haff ze leetle shy at ze Monsieur Redcoat," urbanely observed old Barbareau, as the schooner, once more out of danger of the dreaded forty-two, was coming about on her next tack in order to get back on the enemy's quarter. "I tink zat I can do zometings fine."

As he sighted the gun, and let go with it, Flinders had his telescope to his eye.

A shower of splinters sprung from the enemy's port bow, and there seemed to be a sort of crash following.

"Harpoons and fishhooks!" shouted Flinders, with a brief relapse into oldtime vulgarity in his excitement; "he's done it! Keel-haul me, if he hasn't!"

"What has he done?" cried Dick and Junk in a breath.

"Wrecked the forty-pounder teetotally! You needn't mind about such long range now, Dick. That bull-dog's biggest tooth is drawn!"

Even Barbareau, modest as he mostly was, could not refrain from joining in the jubilation of this piece of news.

"Ah!" he cried, springing astride of the gun, and patting it with his hands; "ze gun of brass is a good gun, and ze ball of iron—"

He was interrupted by the roar of the sloop's entire port broadside, and was the next instant swept into eternity—his head being carried off by the only round shot that crossed the Witch's deck.

No little gloom was cast over the officers and crew by this distressing incident, for, apart from its being the only casualty of the sort the schooner had sustained for a long time, the old Acadian was no less a good-hearted, popular man than a superb, almost unrivaled gunner.

The privateer now began to get in some good and rapid work with her thirty-twos upon her giant but unwieldy adversary, which seemed to have had several of her guns disabled in some previous engagement, and whose only remaining ones, after the wrecking of her big forty-pounder, seemed to be twenty-fours.

After a number of effective shots had been well placed by the privateer at long range, chiefly to the further damaging of the man-of-war's tops, Dick was making arrangements with his two mates for the preparation and delivery of some red-hot shot—an experiment that had never yet been essayed on board the Witch, which was, nevertheless, supplied with the wherewithal for such attempts—Miss Goldheart showed her head above the companionway in some excitement.

"Jessie is in hysterics, Captain Dareall," she said. "You see, she has never been through this sort of thing, as I have, and it seems to have upset her nerves completely. As she keeps calling for you constantly, I think you had better come to her, if you can. Doctor Ferguson thinks so, too, and so does Doctor Mackenzie. Nothing that they can prescribe seems to quiet her."

Dick left a few parting instructions, and then hurried down to the after-cabin.

He was with Jessie much longer than he felt he had a right to be, but at last had the satisfaction of seeing her grow more calm, and finally fall to sleep under the influence of opiates.

He was then hastening back to the deck, when he heard a distant roar, which was followed by a tremendous cheering from the schooner's crew.

He could well afford to join in the jubilation on reaching his post.

The second hot shot had just been delivered by Flinders from the bow-chaser (poor Barbareau's pet gun) with the effect of blowing up the man-of-war's main magazine.

Nor was this all.

She was on fire amidships, the wildest confusion was rife among her ship's company, and her great hull had a list to starboard, indicating that she was hit, doubtless badly, between wind and water.

The Witch was now sailed in at half-range, whence she poured in shot after shot into her huge but disabled adversary, when it was presently perceived through the smoke that she had struck her flag.

"Send help aboard!" was roared from her poop as the privateer swung in closer. "We're on fire!"

The prize was at once taken possession of, and the flames finally extinguished after a long and arduous battle on the part of both crews, victors and vanquished, but not before she was so irretrievably injured that it was decided to complete her destruction, after transferring her prisoners to the privateer.

These latter numbered two hundred and thirty men, officers and crew, including a number of wounded. Eighteen had been killed outright.

The prize proved to be the sloop-of-war Ganymede, sixteen guns, Captain Reginald Morganton, commanding. She was not one of the Southern blockaders, but recently from New York Harbor. She had, however, participated in the defeat and pursuit of the French fleet, and had received her original injuries in a gallant but imprudent brush with D'Estaing's retreating flagship, which was more than twice her strength and size.

While the prisoners were being transferred to the privateer, Dr. Mackenzie approached Captain Dareall to say that among the wounded in the cockpit was a young midshipman, in extremis, who was imploring to be allowed to see him.

Dick immediately accompanied the surgeon, and was grief-stricken to recognize in the wounded lad—who was frightfully injured in the lower extremities, with but a short time to live—none other than little Jack Granthby.

He had been exchanged at Philadelphia but three weeks previous, and had then joined the Ganymede under orders at New York, with this lamentable result.

CHAPTER L.

POOR LITTLE JACK—CONCLUSION.

A BRIGHT smile lighted the boy's brave little face as his fading eyes rested upon the young commander.

"You are come! Real good of you, Cap!" he murmured. "Do take me by the fin, Cap!"

Dick took both the poor little hands in his without trusting himself to speak.

"I say, Cap!" cheerily came again from the dying lips.

"Well, my boy?"

"What a stunning schooner you've got for a privateer!"

"You think so?"

"Think so! Who doesn't know it? And—I say, Cap!"

"What is it?"

"I—I," the voice was dropping still fainter, "commanded the other—the little Witch—all alone for a short space, didn't I?"

"That you did, my lad!"

"I—I," nothing but a whisper now, "say, Cap!"

"Yes?"

"I—I always liked you, Cap—mebbe it was a sort of love, you know."

"Yes, yes!"

"Would you mind kissing me, Cap?"

Dareall bent over the face to comply.

He was not ashamed of the one big tear which, as he slowly raised his head, fell upon a face that was the face of life no longer.

And that was all.

And this is all.

The gallant privateer reached Philadelphia with her prisoners, without further adventure.

Her coming, thus caparisoned with victory from peak to keel and from stem to stern, so to speak, was an event of national jubilation, and something more than a mere salve for the prevailing misery and depression over the repulse of the Savannah relief expedition.

Dick received his promised sword from the Congress at last; more prize-money was forthcoming for all hands; and there was triumph, congratulation and glory generally.

But, after but a brief rest for the enjoyment of all these honors, so well deserved, so bravely won, the privateer proceeded to her chosen little home at Tom's River—her return

constituting a big day for the Barnegatters, as we may well believe.

There was a notable double-wedding at Tom's River in less than a month thereafter, the names of whose contracting principals participating therein need hardly be mentioned.

Jessie Dearborn was so complacent, in the light of recently occurring events, as to forget her original vow not to be married before the end of the war, and Dick Dareall was not the one to gainsay the reconsideration of a resolve that had already caused him so many a pining heartache and so many a dream deferred.

Mrs. Goldheart never quite got over the seemingly ill-assorted marriage of her daughter with Ezekiah Flinders, of the Mist Witch. But Naomi herself was perfectly happy in her choice, her own father gave her away at the altar with smiling acquiescence to the inevitable, if not with complete satisfaction, Captain Goldheart, her brother, was one of the first to grasp her bridegroom by the hand in the post-nuptial congratulatory shake, and even the vain old lady herself managed to witness the ceremony without fainting dead away.

The married lives of both couples proved exceptionally happy and fruitful, their descendants being numerous and respected to this day, along the Jersey east shore especially.

After the war old Sam Junk lived yet long with his daughter in a little cottage near Osbornville, in well-to-do circumstances on the prize-money he had managed to save, and where his gusty yarns of privateering and adventure became household words.

Jerry Wardlow's career, after his being vested in the great Collingford estate, proved a double disappointment—a bitter one to his erst worthless companions, a joyful one to his true friends.

In a small way, it was a reproduction of the example of Prince Hal on the latter's accession to his father's throne, when "that fat old man" Falstaff was so summarily bidden to stand aside from the path of the coronation procession, when the equally bibulous and no less unconscionable Bardolph, Nym and Pistol were so conveniently and unexpectedly forgotten, and real princely ambitions stepped into the place of wild license and unworthy aims.

Jerry married well, became thoroughly respectable, and lived out the remainder of his life with honor to himself and profit to his fellows.

Circumstances—"environment" is the favorite word in these evolutionary days—have more to do than is generally supposed with molding a young life and influencing a career, and it is not always your ne'er-do-well who goes to the devil in the end, if accorded the chances and opportunities that may have been cruelly and unjustly withheld.

And the privateer herself, the gallant, the incomparable Sea Witch! what of her?

Dick Dareall and his brave men sailed many another cruise in her before the close of the war, and if none of these was of quite such unexampled success as had distinguished her first two, all were more or less glorious and profitable to the noble cause of Independence, which she contributed to achieve.

Her end was no less glorious than and not dissimilar to that of her prototype and lesser namesake.

In the last year of the war she had made a prize of a large British West Indiaman off the Florida Keys, when a sudden squall hurled her upon a sunken rock, where she received such irretrievable damage to her bottom as to preclude all hope of her ever being sailed on a voyage again.

So, as in the case of the Mist Witch, after being temporarily repaired, she was started on her solitary cruise out to death, Dauntless Dareall and his crew sadly watching her funeral course from the decks of her last capture, as she headed grandly and pathetically for the mid-sea, sails set, colors flying, like a dying swan without the fabled death-song, and in realization of Holmes's plea for the ceremonious funeral of a yet grander and more pretentious ship—

"Nail to the mast her tattered flag,
Set every threadbare sail,
And give her to the god of storms,
The lightning and the gale!"

THE END.

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98 WILLIAM ST., NEW YORK.

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